

Motherhood experiences through transformations : narratives of intergenerational continuities and changes in post-Communist Poland

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**MOTHERHOOD EXPERIENCES THROUGH
TRANSFORMATIONS: NARRATIVES OF
INTERGENERATIONAL CONTINUITIES AND CHANGES
IN POST-COMMUNIST POLAND**

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**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.**

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NOVEMBER 2009
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The illustration on page 107 and
appendix 3 pages 240-242
have been excluded at the request
of the University

DEDICATION

To the wonderful, warm and wise mothers who surround me and who have always offered me their love, support and knowledge.

Also to Pola, whose presence has allowed me to appreciate the demands of the maternal work.

ABSTRACT

In 1989 the transition in Poland from autocratic communism to neoliberal capitalism precipitated a most fundamental and radical crossover from paternal state to social liberalism. This thesis is based on a narrative enquiry aimed at examining the impact of these shifting socio-historical contexts on mothers' lives in Poland through a focus on two groups of women who became mothers before and after 1989.

This thesis examines the presumed new opportunities, greater choice and freedoms offered by this new neoliberal context in Poland through the narratives of the participants in this study. It investigates how the changing contexts facilitate the appearance of new but also sustain the presence of old cultural models of motherhood. The vast political, economic, social and cultural transformations were dictated by the globally overarching framework of the neoliberal or market metanarrative reshaping power relations and structures and impacting on everyday individual experiences. The changing role of the state, in particular in the area of childcare and the support offered to working mothers, reshaped constructions of motherhood and experiences of mothering and contributed to growing stratification amongst Polish mothers.

The majority of sociological analyses of this period define post-communist socio-economic groups dichotomously, as either 'winners' or 'losers'. Both groups of mothers participating in this study (constituting the older and younger cohort) can be identified as 'winners' due to their more privileged socio-economic positions, and as such they represent a significant minority of Polish society. This thesis demonstrates how these mothers have been affected by the transformations by tracing continuities and changes in their practices, understandings and everyday experiences of mothering. The analysis shows that in spite of their relatively privileged position these women's experiences as mothers are affected too, in various ways, by the new neoliberal context. This research focus offers valuable insights into the specific lived experiences of this understudied group of assumed 'winners'.

The data from the two cohorts of mothers and the conclusions reached through its analysis demonstrate the extent to which political upheaval impacts the normative cultural models of motherhood. This fine grained focus on the lived experiences of two groups of women confirms the persistence of enduring images of the working and coping Polish mother. The emergence of new pressures and challenges presented to mothers as embodied in the glamorised images of the 'New Polish Woman' appear in the narratives of the participants alongside old rhetorical constructions such as *Matka Polka*.

The analysis in this thesis offers important contributions to sociological studies by questioning the existing oversimplified 'winner/loser' categorisations, and demonstrating how ideologies of motherhood discipline and circumscribe experiences of mothering. This thesis also provides a qualitative contribution to better understandings of the deeply textured aspects of women's lives as mothers in the context of shifting social, cultural, economic and political environments by illuminating change and continuity in the areas of gendered relations, constructions of selves, discourses and practices around motherhood, mothering and individuality.

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Introduction

*I'm a modern mum ... and I can say that with full awareness,
because I come from a small town, and I have lots of friends who are mothers.
It's not even that I had the child late, no; it's the fact that it was a planned motherhood,
I returned to work quite quickly, and I manage, I cope with everything!*
(Magda, 30)

In 1989 the transformation in Poland from autocratic communism to neoliberal capitalism precipitated a most fundamental and radical crossover from paternal state to social liberalism. The goal of this thesis is to firstly explore women's experiences of motherhood through this period of significant political, economic, social and cultural transformation; and secondly, to investigate the specific situation of mothers who have been positioned as the 'winners' of the transformation.¹ I argue that the post-communist transformation has significantly determined and reshaped the experiences of mothers in Poland, through the changing role of the state. The redefined social and economic priorities of the new political environment have led to a growing stratification in the experiences of motherhood. On the one hand, the promotion of aggressive capitalism and the significant devaluation of the paternal role of the state have resulted in a new poverty class considerably inhabited by mothers trapped in the peripheries of the labour market, their choices constrained by unemployment and the lack of state support. On the other hand, the possibilities provided by neoliberal opportunities and discourses have enabled those in more central, often metropolitan and well-educated labour markets, to negotiate the terms of their work and mothering choices. These mothers (mainly the younger cohort in this study see Chapter 4), while to a lesser extent preoccupied with basic economic survival, present themselves in ways indicating shifts in their understandings of the role of motherhood in their lives, which highlights their privileged positions. As this thesis demonstrates, their professional and personal choices are conditioned by a combination of cultural and economic demands that circumscribe their mothering experience. Numerous scripts emerged through the analysis of the personal accounts, signifying various intergenerational changes in these women's lives as mothers, wives and workers, but the continuities that emerged denote the persistence of specific cultural models and assumptions embedded in the obdurate, for some even oppressive, idea of the Polish coping mother, vernacularly present in such cultural constructions as the contested myth of Matka Polka.

The discussion in this thesis is structured around the idea that changing contexts produce shifting meanings of what 'appropriate' mothering should look like, defining also the ideologies of motherhood. I argue in this thesis that despite the apparent novelty of the contemporary representations of womanhood epitomised by such mass media-promoted models as the image of the 'New Polish Woman' (Seibert, 2001), these representations still contain historical elements of old rhetorical constructions of a coping Polish mother. This continuity becomes apparent in the accounts produced by both generations where the idea of the coping mother reappears regularly throughout. In these narratives the women seem compelled to present themselves as mothers who can 'cope' and 'manage' with various demands imposed on them by their shifting life contexts thus reflecting the social and cultural expectations and pressures exerted on women in Poland.

The notions of motherhood and mothering employed in this thesis are conceptually different. The concept of motherhood denotes particular social representations that embody idealised constructions of how mothering should be done and who the 'good mother' is in a specific socio-historical and cultural context (Rich, 1977; Budrowska, 2000; Miller, 2005). The concept of mothering, on the other hand, reflects everyday experiences. In her classic work on the patriarchal foundation of motherhood Adrienne Rich (1977) asserted that motherhood is an institution by exposing how specific representations of motherhood have been used and appropriated by men throughout history to control women's lives and bodies. In Poland, like many other countries, specific constructions of motherhood have been employed and manipulated in different eras by various players: the State, the Catholic Church, nationalistic and pro-family movements and political groupings. From the emblematic figure of *Polonia* of the nineteenth century partitioned Poland, through the model of the communist working mother, to the more recent glamorised image of the 'New Polish Woman' (Seibert, 2001), myths surrounding motherhood in Poland have had a considerable impact on the lives of Polish mothers. One particularly powerful construction, highly contested for its fluidity, intractability, and obscure but at the same time obdurate nature, is the concept of *Matka Polka*, which exists in the Polish vernacular as a popular symbolic marker of the strong coping mother.

In order to locate and conceptualise the participants' narratives on motherhood and mothering within the broader cultural and socio-economic context of the transformation I have employed the notion of the coping mother and the neoliberal or market metanarrative (Weiner, 2007). After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, liberalism, closely linked with the growth of the markets, technology, capital, the nation-state and individualism, began to be seen as the only ideology capable of realising the social and material demands of

individuals (Browning, 2000:152-153). In reality, it was the global reach of the neoliberal trend in the world's economy that importantly defined the Polish transformation with the shift to democracy after communism being accompanied by various discourses that form the metanarrative of the market (Kołodko, 2009; Podstawski, 2010; Shields, 2011). This metanarrative draws on the features of the neoliberal form of capitalism and its ideals regarding transformations of economies and people (Weiner, 2007). This thesis understands neoliberalism as a complex set of interrelated notions that promote ideas and values apparently ingrained in the workings of the free market as understood within Western democracies.² These include self-reliance, competitiveness, autonomy, and personal responsibility. However, it is important to note that in the post-communist milieu this new vocabulary collided with the socio-historical context of Poland and while creating unprecedented opportunities for the big business and transnational corporations, it caused untold confusion amongst other sectors of the society. The novelty of the labour market regulations and its requisition of 'flexible management' and the 'self-regulating selves' has been both a source of discovery and distress for the Polish people (Dunn, 2004:7).

The second concept that frames the argument in this thesis is the idea of the coping mother whose most salient invocation can be found in popular conceptions of the myth of Matka Polka. Since its formation in the eighteenth century, the meaning of the concept has fluctuated with the changing socio-historical context. The most enduring aspect of Matka Polka has been the idea of selflessness and sacrifice, which has also altered with time, each of its context-specific manifestations successfully gripping the imagination of the nation. This myth exists in the public discourse, but at the same time there is no consensus on its symbolic meaning or the extent to which Polish mothers relate to the myth. It exists linguistically as a collection of assumed traits rather than as a fixed entity. The concept of Matka Polka is used as a 'mental shortcut' to denote a range of values and attitudes. In this thesis the concept emerged as a powerful construction in the accounts of the Polish mothers interviewed. Across the thesis it is used to signify ideals and experiences of women as mothers coping with the various demands placed upon them. It is perpetuated and drawn upon in two ways: through constructions of motherhood and through individual experiences of mothering. An examination of these specific representations helps to expose the various political, economic, societal and cultural powers exerted on Polish women throughout recent history, thus contributing to a better understanding of two groups of mothers' lives in new democratic Poland.

In contrast to other works that employ the concept of Matka Polka and relate to it as a rather static construct, in this thesis I consider the myth of Matka Polka as a fluid but also durable

representation of idealised motherhood (e.g. Titkow, 1995; Seibert, 2001; Ostrowska, 2004; Sz wajcowska, 2006). I purport that there are some aspects of the myth that remain unchanged, such as the ability to cope as well as the quality of self-sacrifice (even if shifting in its meaning and context) and pride, whilst also acknowledging that there are other aspects that change in relation to the demands towards maternal work in different eras. I argue that the current representations of womanhood promoted through the media continue to draw upon these obdurate characteristics of 'appropriate' Polish womanhood. Thus, I claim that the idea of the coping mother, ever present in the Polish vernacular as *Matka Polka*, remains the backbone of the seemingly novel models and that she has been revamped to meet the new demands of the free market and to resonate with the 'New Polish Woman' (Seibert, 2001). These two dominant narratives, of neoliberalism and of the coping mother, have shaped the lives of the mothers who participated in this research project in powerful ways.

The 'New Polish Woman', a term coined by human geographer Anita Seibert (2001), describes an identity of a successful woman who is both a mother and a worker and who has been able to take advantage of the opportunities apparently offered by democracy after communism. After conducting a thorough examination of images available in women's magazines over a period of almost six years (May 1995-February 2001), Siebert concluded that:

... the image of the New Polish Woman shows women as modern, sexually liberated and independent. It shows women working outside the home in interesting and lucrative occupations, and most importantly it presents them as very similar to women from any other developed countries. At the same time, however, the New Polish Woman is expected to nurture her Polish identity, focus on her appearance, ensure that she is attractive to men, and secure a partner who is preferably her husband and the father of her children (2001:273-274).

Images consistent with the notion of the 'New Polish Woman' are actively promoted in the mass media and public discourses as the ultimate ideals for women in post-1989 Poland. These representations construct some women as the transformational beneficiaries in the sense of having the potential to achieve it 'all'. Despite the apparent 'newness' of the idea, the novelty of this image is illusory because in fact the concept of 'doing it all' resembles the communist version of femininity. As Seibert noted, the 'New Polish Woman' is simultaneously *Matka Polka* and a Communist Woman (2001:273) but her existence is far more figurative than the former one. While it is important to note that the concept of the 'New Polish Woman' is a dominant image women in post-communist Poland have been confronted with, it does not (yet) function as a metaphor in everyday language to the extent that the contradictory, intangible and contested notion of *Matka Polka* does.³ Therefore both

concepts—one tangible and clearly observable in neoliberal discourses promoted by the media but absent from the common vernacular, and one conceptually elusive and contradictory but ever present in the vocabularies of men and women commenting on motherhood—have a bearing on how Polish mothers articulate and situate themselves in these changing contexts. This thesis incorporates both ideas as influential aspects of the discussion on what constitutes, shapes and determines motherhood experiences in Poland acknowledging the weaknesses, contradictions and tensions involved in their incorporation.

There is a plethora of work produced in the area of post-communist studies which focuses on the effects of the transformation at the economic, political, and social levels.⁴ However, women's experiences *per se* of the transformation are still underexplored and marginalised while mothers' experiences especially remain largely unvoiced (Gal and Kligman, 2000b; Ingham *et al.*, 2001; Malinowska, 2009; Hardy, 2009:163-183). Through its focus on micro analysis, this thesis contributes to more subtle understandings of the everyday realities of a group of mothers in post-communist Poland who can be seen as occupying relatively privileged positions in terms of their socio-economic status and thus can be categorised as the beneficiaries of the post-communist transformation. Whilst social theorists investigating the post-communist context mainly draw attention to the marginalisation and exclusion of the working class following the introduction of capitalism into the former Soviet Bloc countries, the life trajectories of those who apparently benefited from the transformation are usually assumed (Emigh and Szelényi, 2001; Stenning, 2005a, 2005b). Furthermore, existing theorisations are centred mainly on the macro dimension of the new democratic order. As observed by Michael Burawoy and Katherine Verdery, however, 'a focus on the day-to-day realities of post-socialism reveals a more ambiguous account of the transformation announced with such fanfare' (1999:6). To date, the negative aspects of the transformation have received prime attention in the sociological studies through focus on economically disadvantaged groups. This thesis, in turn, offers a unique contribution to these studies through a much needed analysis of the life stories of a group of relatively advantaged mothers. Their socio-economic situation might be seen as having strong positive implications for their experiences due to greater access to employment and education as well as better health and childcare than, for example, mothers who live in rural and more remote areas. Through a detailed focus on this particular group, assumptions around opportunities offered by the neoliberal discourses but evidently not available to all, can be verified. The importance of this particular group transpires in the fact that their life stories position these women as an ostensible example of success stories of the neoliberal changes in Poland. The actual experiences of these women as mothers and workers in post-communist Poland, even

though they constitute a minority of the Polish society, offer an opportunity to question and verify often oversimplified claims about the gendered challenges of their day-to-day lives. Through its specific focus, this thesis engages with the ongoing discussion on the social costs of transformation for women who are mothers.

The material on which this thesis is based has been largely gathered through interviews with women residing in the urban environments of Warszawa, Szczecin and Kołobrzeg. The data was collected between 2005 and 2006 from two groups of women who were mostly working mothers. This thesis is theoretically underpinned by an understanding of social life as storied, where the narration of the self derives from, and is located within, other larger narratives that shape individual stories (Somers, 1994; Ezzy, 1998; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). My discussion throughout this thesis is significantly influenced by feminist standpoint theory. Using women's experiences as a starting point for enquiry I have prioritised their voices to socially situate knowledge about their lives (Harding, 1991; Harsock, 1987). Such 'fine-grained' analysis attempts to examine intergenerational shifts in women's experiences of motherhood and therefore needs to be thoroughly contextualised (Kovács and Váradi, 2000:177). The women participating in this project must be seen within a broader cultural and socio-political context of their apparently privileged positions and the communist or post-communist context in Poland (depending on generation) as this importantly shapes motherhood, mothering, femininities and gender relations which continue to influence their experiences.

Setting the Context: Poland Before and After the Post-Communist Transformation

Historical contextualisation sheds light on the discussion of the role of motherhood in the life of Polish women. The events of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century influenced the social roles of women in a very specific and obdurate way. The political shifts and social rearrangements fundamentally contributed to the supposedly elevated status of a mother in Polish society. Poland was partitioned three times between its neighbours in 1772, 1793 and 1795,⁵ and disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years (Davies, 2005b:60-119). During that time the nation struggled to preserve its national identity and women's social roles became crucial elements in what is perceived as a crusade to safeguard Polishness. Partitioning was shortly followed by the two World Wars and then over forty years of communist rule. Historically then, constructions of womanhood and representations of women's lives have been defined in Poland in certain specific ways: the demands of the

maternal work went beyond the child bearing and rearing into the preservation of national identity (Janion, 2006a; 2006b; Walczewska, 2000; Titkow, 1995). The active role taken in upholding national identity through the preservation of language and tradition became a vital feature marking and shaping the social position of mothers simultaneously creating specific expectations around the notion of a mother.

Poland regained its independence for a short time between 1918 and 1939 and then after the Second World War (1939-1945) became one of the 'Soviet satellite countries'.⁶ Consequently, the first post-war political order realised in the new administration was formed under Soviet auspices and even though the Polish regime exercised a reasonable degree of autonomy and power, it ultimately remained subject to Soviet sanctions (Davies, 2005b:413-481).⁷ The collapse of the communist system throughout Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s initiated complex political, economic, social and cultural transformations in the region. Since 1989 radical transformations of values, norms and standards have been taking place in Poland and other post-communist countries guided by the framework of neoliberalism. Simultaneously, power relations, legal and political institutions, the economic model, as well as structures of ownership, class and employment have undergone further dramatic changes (Jasiecki, 2005:25). The transformation permeated all spheres of social, cultural, economic and political life affecting everyone in varied and often uneven ways. The shifts on the economic level have most dramatically led to changes in everyday life for many people. Privatisation, seen as a crucial element of labour market restructuring, in reality meant major shifts in the workforce that left significant numbers of people unemployed in a traumatically short period of time. The relative security offered through welfare benefits and guaranteed employment during the communist era vanished. Consequently, poverty, unemployment and marginalisation became the key issues of socio-economic politics in post-communist Poland (Kozak, 2005:141). These social problems were consequences of the transformation but they also have been further reinforced by institutional ineffectiveness in addressing them.⁸

In a period of just over two decades since the communist system collapsed in Poland, the consequences of the political and economic shifts have unfolded in different ways for different recipients. The transformation from a centrally planned economy to capitalist economic relations, fuelled by the neoliberal promises of a better life for all, brought about new opportunities and greater choice but also new forms of constraint and growing inequalities. The artificially controlled social equality during the communist era, in the new post-1989 reality exposed growing stratification between those who were able to take advantage of the changing socio-political contexts and those who might not have the right

skills, experience, age or connections (Palska, 2002:10). In sociological discussions this latter group is often described as 'surviving', 'getting by' or 'struggling' with the new reality (Marody, 2000b; Strzyczkowski, 2000; Giza-Poleszczuk, *et al.*, 2000).

In the landscape of sociological enquiry on post-communism there has been a common perception that the political and economic shifts have exposed two main groups: the 'winners' and the 'losers'.⁹ In the context of social stratification the 'winners' represent a significant minority of the society and are those who are more able to reap the benefits and opportunities apparently offered by democracy and economic changes.¹⁰ These classifications are usually based on the notions of individual economic status.¹¹ Yet, the indicators of success based on socio-economic privilege or achievement do not fully reflect the diversity of individual situations and pathways, pathways which are negotiated in the course of everyday interactions. In an attempt to tackle the ambiguity and bias of the 'winners/losers' classification, the ongoing sociological debate on post-communism employs various other distinctions such as: victims and beneficiaries, claimants and independents, underclass and middle class (Palska, 2002:11). However, these dichotomous categorisations still do not address the complexity of the ways in which social status and social divisions are negotiated.

The categories of 'losers' and 'winners' of the transformation have been very loosely employed in the public discourse in Poland by journalists, pundits and commentators on social life since the very early 1990s. However, these discursive constructs pose more problems than they attempt to explain. According to socio-economic analyses, women have generally been the main bearers of the cost of the systemic shifts due to their more limited employability, higher risk of suffering from long term unemployment, and the general assumption that all women are potentially mothers and thus cannot guarantee work permanency. Consequently, mothers have been specifically positioned as those who have clearly 'lost' because of the transformation (Gal and Kligman, 2000b; Ingham *et al.*, 2001; Malinowska, 2009; Hardy, 2009:163-183; Desperak, 2009a; 2009b). In contrast, the women participating in this study could be seen as the 'winners' of the transformation because of their socio-economic status and so potential for gain. Yet, while the younger cohort might be considered as fitting into this category, such a categorisation of the older cohort becomes problematic. For example, those women who were able to successfully adapt to the new post-communist reality and became sole family providers (as their husbands found themselves affected by long-term unemployment) would definitely not position themselves as 'winners'. The complexity of their lives, their gendered positions within the home realm and the resultant power struggles (clearly visible at times in their narratives) together with

their age, gender and work experience within the labour market, pose questions about such clear cut dichotomous categorisations. Even for many of the younger participants the reality of capitalism triggered insecurity and stress linked, for example, with the fear of unemployment. The personal narratives analysed in this thesis reveal a more complex and multifaceted picture of these women's lived experience as mothers providing an important contribution to the existing body of research that challenges oversimplified dichotomies and classification of 'winners/losers' in contemporary post-communist societies (Parvu, 2005; Marody, 2000b; Crow and Rees, 1999).

Mothering in Neoliberal Post-Communist Poland

A more detailed theoretical and temporal frame of neoliberalism is vital to better illuminate and set the context of this work as well as to appreciate the limitations of the concepts of transformational 'winners' and 'losers'. An outline of the neoliberal ideology in this section and a subsequent analysis of the consequences of the economic and political reforms in Poland after 1989 will serve as a backdrop to the changes in the role of motherhood in the national rhetoric and shed light on the everyday maternal struggles within both the economic and the less financially-related contexts. The discussion of key aspects of neoliberalism offered in this section will provide a context from which to better understand the pressures and perceived opportunities and thus the importance of the narratives of the younger cohort—the supposed 'winners' of the transformation.

The 1989 shift from communism to post-communism redefined the representation of motherhood promoted during the communist era and contributed to a number of sociological studies which have positioned mothers as 'losers' of the transformation.¹² The state's withdrawal from its previously offered assistance—childcare subsidies, long and paid maternity leave, secured paid work after a return from maternity leave, subsidised contraceptives and legal abortions—meant that the relatively uniform experience of being a mother in the communist era, became undertaken in more diverse and visibly unequal circumstances after the communist system collapsed. Motherhood and associated mothering experiences in the communist era were constructed in ways that restricted agency and choice where maternal work sat alongside paid work but the model of the working mother was actively promoted by the communist propaganda machine and supported by relevant legislative statutes. However, as a consequence of the post-communist transformation, large groups of women became downwardly mobile and their experiences as mothers exposed the

existing social diversities and inequalities. Simultaneously, the seemingly greater freedom and more choice available to the significantly smaller minority of Polish women (especially those with the human capital, for example with higher education and homes in urban areas), also do not always reflect the reality of mothering experiences that often turn out to be a struggle.

In post-1989 Poland, the premises and practices of neoliberalism have led to a situation where the poor get poorer, the rich get richer and the middle classes shrink. This stratifying character of neoliberalism mirrors the wider world trend. In Poland, it is also signified by the fact that the actual social costs of the post-communist transformation were not wholly anticipated by its designers or the incumbent Polish government who ultimately ratified the economic restructuring. Amongst the three options for the economic reformation offered by the World Bank, Poland's political leaders of *Solidarność* chose the most radical version of liberalisation and stabilisation programmes based on neoliberal ideals: the so-called 'shock therapy', labelled sometimes as the 'Big Bang', because it represented an extreme version of the free-market doctrine. Grzegorz Kołodko (2009), a leading Polish economist, a key architect of the Polish economic reforms and the former Finance Minister¹³, has ironically suggested a rather more accurate label for the profound changes involved in the implemented reformation programmes (which naively simplified institutional aspects of the market economy and ignored the social dimension of the transformation), calling the transformation a 'shock without therapy'. This version of transformation followed the premises of what John Williamson (1990) phrased as the 'Washington Consensus', which has been since employed as a reference to the neoliberal policies that were introduced as a programme for economic change in Poland and is linked with the unequal distribution of income and wealth producing unprecedented levels of poverty in Poland (Kołodko, 1999; Watson, 2006). The 'Washington Consensus' is also held responsible by its critics for pushing democratic and social concerns off the reform agenda (Puchalska, 2005:816). Designed by an American economist Jeffery David Sachs and conveyed in Poland by Leszek Balcerowicz, the economic plan turned out to be one of the most miscalculated and poorly instigated reforms in global modern history – poor especially in terms of predicted GDP, inflation and changes to manufacturing (Majmurek and Szmulewicz, 2009:8). For example, the Polish economist Tadeusz Kowalik (2007) claims that the actual results with regard to the economic cost were in fact five times higher than estimated in 1990.¹⁴

Whether Poland's (newly formed) political elites' desire to move towards Western style neoliberalism in 1989 was a result of an ill-judged, ill-advised and ultimately over-zealous will to establish political contrast with the exiting communist reality or whether the

neoliberal agenda was a judiciously chosen methodology on which to base national growth driven by an altruistic leadership has been discussed at length by scholars including Dale (2011), Shields (2008; 2011) and Rae (2007) and continues to be contested and debated. What is now known as the (Sachs-)Balcerowicz Plan focused on a stabilisation programme aimed at dealing with inflation, the regulation of government finances, and the privatisation of the state's assets. In general Polish government adopted the Anglo-American model of capitalism which is now widely regarded as unsuitable given the incompatibility of the market and the political institutions of the former system (Podstawski, 2010; Kołodko, 2009; Bożyk, 2008; Gray, 1993). After the 1989 elections the political elites began reforms that were socially unexpected and at odds with the initial election programmes that did not proclaim total privatisation and formation of what has been assessed (also by the participants of this research) as 'wild capitalism'. The fashion in which the reforms were conducted was highly criticised by some of the most prominent observers of the Polish political scene showing that the proposed non-alternative solution to the Polish transformation was only alleged (Kołodko, 2009).

In 1989, and already 39 billion dollars in debt but buoyed on by the prospect of release from communism, the new *Solidarność* Party, under the main auspices of the U.S., the E.U. and the U.K., embarked on the philosophical agenda of neoliberalism (using the methodology and doctrine of the West) and supported the adoption of an economic stimulation package which took as its prime tenet the neoliberal doctrine of the West (Corbridge, 1993). The 'Sachs-Balcerowicz Plan' was embraced in full by the new *Solidarność* leadership moving the new nation from a protected and mercantilist economy to a market economy with all the anticipated benefits this would provide including individual autonomy and freely elected democratic governments (Shields, 2008:3; Balcerowicz, 1995:233). Importantly, as noted for example by Hardy (2009:145-146), there were significant tensions between *Solidarność* as a political party and as a trade union, which highlight the differences between the apparent unified agreement for the shock therapy measures and the criticism regarding the implementation of neoliberalism in Poland.¹⁵ The belief that the new market model would quickly bring Western-style capitalism to Poland through rising living standards for all might have fuelled the illusions about the market amongst political leaders, but growing unemployment, job cuts and great struggles against privatisation in workplaces caused mass protests throughout the whole state industrial sector and resulted in open calls for strikes from the trade unions (ibid).

Neoliberalism assumes that adherence to rules is rewarded with a natural efficiency improvement in the economy and sustainable development; as Hardy put it, the 'invisible

hand of capitalism produces a particular set of results which are outside the control of human agency and is, therefore, impartial in its operation' (2006:136). Certainly, the 'Sachs-Balcerowicz Plan' presumed that speed was 'of the essence' and that this would ameliorate the anticipated pain and burden suffered by the poor. 'The outcome', according to Shields, 'was that it was considered better to undertake all the changes concurrently and as rapidly as possible because of the threat that the "losers" would feel the social costs and uncertainties pushed through by the shocks of institutional change a lot quicker than the "winners" would experience success' (2008:10-11). These social costs soon became very palpable as at least 5 million Polish workers became either unemployed or unwillingly retired. As Shields poignantly notes, 'paradoxically, the neoliberal attempt to correct the "over socialisation" of the economy created a gigantic welfare state' (2008:11).

The transformation in Poland, and other countries in the region, was dictated by global power relations that set the economic standards in the post-Soviet countries and positioned the market at the centre of human activity. In this new environment the state's autonomy became circumscribed on the international arena consequently limiting its role as the regulator of the new economy while neoliberal discourse shifted this role to the so-called 'invisible hand' of the market. This is in stark contrast to the very apparent role of the state under communist rule whereby the state was instrumental in how the economy and the society operated. The new context redefined the meaning of categories such as 'citizen', 'worker' and 'mother' yet without consideration for the Polish local specificities that complicate the practical understanding of these categories, which in turn has very concrete implications for social life in Poland.

Post-communist Polish governments adopted the Western strategy of depoliticisation, which distances political power centres from unpopular decisions without relinquishing control (Burnham, 2001). Neoliberalist policies are held to offer a particular version of nationhood: government must withdraw from commercial interest and, whilst casting off the blame through masterful political rhetoric, ensure that social responsibilities are met in order to achieve the desired nationhood. The ideal role of government in a perfect, but impossible, neoliberal state is to remove its influence from the market force and solely provide conditions within which commerce can run unimpeded. The upshot is that the promise of a Western idealised lifestyle demonstrated in the media, the assumed viability of a neoliberalist ideology demonstrated by the intelligentsia and the associated political commentary and rhetoric, all lead to a set of popular myths largely accepted by a confused population. In reality, the economic consequences of implementing neoliberal policies contributed to growing social stratification—while promoting economic development the

market contributed to economic and social pathologies. In such socio-economic conditions, Bożyk argues (2008), the state can not be only the 'quiet guardian' of the 'invisible hand of the market'; rather it must strategically support the social and economic processes. In Poland, during the transformation the aggressive neoliberal propaganda marginalised the role of the state by disseminating the negative stereotype of a restrictive state that delimits economic development and oppresses its members by setting unnecessary directives. The only way forward for the market, according to this neoliberal propaganda, is to marginalise the role of the state further. But as Bożyk (2008) notes, without the strategic functions of the state in place, the functioning of the market as the main motor of politics and economy prevents the long-term coordination of economic development and social life.

These neoliberal conditions are a key factor in understanding the environment of post-1989 Poland and provide the necessary context for further discussion. However, the new relations of power have also been significantly altered by the Catholic Church – one of the new legitimate players of the transformation, especially influential in regulating the social life of the nation (due to having a major impact on the formulation of abortion policy and women's control over contraception, pregnancy and abortion). The Catholic Church, together with right-wing parties and various nationalistic, Catholic and pro-life movements, represents one more important source of political power that shapes women's lives as mothers. The Church's role during the communist era was largely symbolic, as it was seen as an informal sanctuary for free speech and the supporter of the opposition to the ruling powers; however, this politically limited but socially significant force has acquired considerable political power in post-1989 Poland. The spiritual capital of the Church as a communist-oppressed institution had inspired hope for change, provided moral support for strikes and other acts of resistance, and claimed moral authority over the deeply Catholic Polish people – once the oppressive system ended and removed the obstacles against exercising more formal power – turned into political capital. From a place of worship whose activities were severely limited by communist control measures such as bans on gatherings and associations, limits to public celebrations of religious holidays, or persecutions of defiant priests, openly Catholic citizens and those associated with *Solidarność*, the Church built on its past and transformed its position through the new rhetoric of civil rights and liberties, thus achieving political legitimacy.¹⁶ The newly amassed institutional authority was illuminated for example in the Church's active involvement in the first democratic elections in June 1989.¹⁷ Once its powerful political position was established, the Church enforced further initiatives such as introducing lessons in religion at schools and hanging crosses in governmental and school

buildings, as well as forcing entries into the Polish Constitution linking the state with religion and ensuring a strong presence of religion in the media.

The Church also continued as a moral regulator. In relation to social issues including gender roles, family planning and spiritual life (not inclusive of other faiths and denominations) the Church derives its political mandate from the statistics that claim about 95 percent of Polish 'souls' as Catholic (CBOS, 2011) thus representing the 'moral majority' of the nation. Critically for this thesis, the Church promulgates a representation of motherhood linked with women's exclusive roles as mothers. Employing a reductionist version of traditional visions and models such as the myth of Matka Polka, the Church has redefined the more modern and inclusive versions propagated in the communist era, calling on women to finally regain their supposedly 'true' vocation. The notions of sacrificial motherhood employed by the Church are linked with the essentialising interpretation of the Virgin Mary and circumscribe the way women in Poland are encouraged and pressured to mother. The institutional power gained by the Church, which enables the Church to have a voice on important matters regarding women's lives, bodies and selves, is illuminated for example in the successful introduction of a strict ban on abortion shortly after the collapse of the communist system, despite significant opposition from the highly polarised public. Indeed, when the debate over the restrictive law (introduced in 1993) was taking place, up to 70 percent of the public opposed the measure, according to OBOP.¹⁸ This resistance could be interpreted less in terms of Poles seeing the law in moral or ethical terms but rather as perceiving it as a possible threat to their newly regained rights for self-determination and civil liberties after the fall of communism.

The 1989 transformation reshaped the institutional framework and Poland's economic structures. This impacted on the whole society in two major ways. On the one hand, the transformation became a motor of change in democratising all aspects of social life, a source of new opportunities within the professional and education environments and a generator of possibilities for new activities (Jędrzejko, 2005:162). On the other hand, the changes also led to the appearance of various inequalities, exposing old and highlighting new problems. For example, the changes brought with them a sense of disappointment and hopelessness for many women, which augmented their marginalisation. For many, the fall of communism only exposed their underprivileged position. This is reflected by authors focused on the gender dimension of the changes whose main concern was the reproduction of gender inequalities under the newly created political power (e.g. Einhorn, 1993; Funk and Mueller, 1993; Moghadam, 1993; Rueschemeyer, 1998). Since 1989 the transformation processes have fundamentally altered gender relations causing corresponding changes in the whole

social structure, including women's position in the labour market, their educational choices, professional careers, and the domestic division of labour and provision of childcare (Płatek, 2004; Matynia, 1994; Marody, 1993; Watson, 1993a; 1993b). Yet, the growing numbers of unemployed and impoverished women gave rise to the phenomena known as the feminisation of poverty and impacted on the social mobility of women (Ingham, *et al.*, 2001; Tarkowska, 2002b). The social polarisation between groups of women changed the constructions of motherhood from a state and society approved 'natural' component of a woman's life during the communist era to a more diversified experience that locates the majority of women as struggling mothers.¹⁹ The reformed institutional order and the transformation of welfare policy, in particular with regard to motherhood, have not bridged the inequalities between the rich and the poor, but rather further reinforced existing differences. The state's withdrawal of childcare subsidies and the new rules governing the capitalist economic relations became the markers of these inequalities between women. These inequalities have been illuminated through the stratification of mothers based on their socio-economic status and which have become more apparent as a result of the transformations.

As feminist scholars have pointed out, the fundamental differences between women's socio-economic backgrounds, race, ethnicity, economic activity, and lifestyle mean that to talk of a collective identity or there being just one 'category' of women as fixed and unitary is both problematic and highly contested (see for example bell hooks, 2000).²⁰ This 'multiple positioning' of women - and mothers - in the Polish context of the transformations exposes phenomena such as the feminisation of poverty and unemployment that were present but hidden during the communist era (Bradley, 2000:480; Ingham, *et al.*, 2001; Szczepański, *et al.*, 2006; Palska, 2002). For example, stratification of mothers along the axes of age, class and location is apparent with the younger and better educated women from urban environments who are able to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by capitalism and the older and working-class women from rural areas who can be trapped in low-paid jobs or long-term unemployment. This is a trend that reflects cross-cultural tendencies and is linked with social mobility. In the democracy as it has unfolded in post-communist Poland an unprecedented rise in unemployment and poverty has greatly influenced the degrees of downward social mobility amongst women and mothers who had been able to afford a reasonable life under the previous system (Tarkowska, 2001; 2002b; Domański, 2002; Szczepański *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, it is important to draw attention to the fact that the experiences of Polish women who are mothers both under communism and in the post-communist era have not been homogenous.

Many scholars who have researched the situation of women in socialist societies 'tend to emphasise the extent to which women's circumstances in these societies are alike' (Bystydziński, 1989:668). Yet, the countries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe never formed a monolithic block (Corrin 1992:2, Einhorn, 1993:12). The differences stemmed from varied cultural, historical, religious and social backgrounds, as well as ethnic and linguistic distinctions. In addition, despite a tendency to view all these countries as politically uniform, there were significant differences in the type of party system in place (Corrin, 1992:4). Just as women cannot be seen as a collective entity, the experiences of individuals who lived under communism also cannot be amalgamated into one vision.

An Overview of Chapters and Categories

Three main and interconnected interests structure this thesis: the socio-political transformation after 1989, women's lives and personal narratives, and the changing concepts of motherhood in Poland. Each of these areas has been foundational in the planning, conducting, and conceptualisation within this study, influencing my methodological, epistemological, and ontological positions. Below I provide an overview of the thesis chapters.

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical foundation for the thesis. I elaborate on the implications of the post-communist transformation, the significance of narrative as a means of explaining one's experience and the shifting social definitions of motherhood. I purport that the transformation, seen here as a process of change conditioned by localised socio-historical contexts, has influenced the role of women's maternal work, and I argue that an exploration of personal narratives allows me to trace these shifts in the lives of a particular group of women. My discussion in this chapter focuses on demonstrating two dominant narratives within which the sampled personal narratives are situated: the market metanarrative and the concept of the coping mother as the most prevalent model of Polish motherhood. This framework sheds light on the ways in which narrative construction of selves is structured and contextualised by other narratives that are 'seldom of individuals' own invention', which in turn illustrates how these dominant narratives can empower the individual stories defining 'what is possible and intelligible' (Weiner, 2007:16; Chase, 2005:667).

This focus on the theoretical foundation of my work is followed by a comprehensive contextual discussion of aspects relating to mothers' lives in Poland before and after the collapse of the communist system in Chapter 2. In this section I examine the various

representations of motherhood as evolving through the history of Poland. I discuss the position of 'the mother' from a socio-historical perspective and demonstrate the relationship between the communist state and motherhood. The chapter explains the prominent role of the Catholic Church and its consequences for Polish women's lives, as well as analysing the masculinisation of the public sphere that followed the fall of communism. This analysis exposes the various powerful players that have shaped the lives of Polish women through history, especially in their roles as mothers.

Chapter 3 examines how the post-communist environment bore witness to the relocation of the position of mothers in the state's rhetoric driven by neoliberal ideology: from the emancipatory discourse of the working socialist mother to the nationalistic calls for domestication which were accompanied by detrimental legislative and institutional changes. This examination is located within a broader analysis of the implications the transformation has had on the reshuffling of social structures and power relations. The chapter discusses the unprecedented radical social polarisation caused by the appearance of unemployment and other economic factors. New phenomena theorised by sociologists as 'new poverty', formation of an underclass, feminisation and infantilisation of poverty are discussed in regard to the contours of the environment in which growing stratification amongst women who are mothers is experienced. This chapter also examines the apparent new opportunities for women to claim the novel identity epitomised in the media-promoted image of the glamorous 'New Polish Woman', which is linked with women's advanced socio-economic position. These two contextual chapters (Chapter 2 and 3) provide an insight into the interconnections between different sets of power relations with regard to individuals and groups. The analysis also demonstrates individuals' ability to move between and negotiate through various structural, institutional and intersubjective constraints, and how such potential opportunities might have shifted through the transformation.

In Chapter 4 the methodological approach adopted in the thesis is described. Here details of the narrative enquiry are outlined including the research process, considerations for the specificity of the research cohorts, as well as reflections on my own position as a researcher for the study. Details of data analysis and the rationale for taking a case study approach in presenting the data is also provided.

The subsequent data chapters are organised as follows: Chapter 5 explores the changing role of motherhood as experienced by two different generations of Polish women. This chapter compares the narrative accounts of the older and younger cohorts, in relation to the women's experiences as mothers within the home and the workplace. This chapter also reveals the

women's evaluations of the impact of the transformation on their experiences of motherhood in Poland. It also demonstrates how these groups of mothers have negotiated, understood and narrated the prevailing cultural ideals of womanhood as embedded in the myth of Matka Polka. Such analysis enables intergenerational commonalities and differences to be exposed. In illuminating the specificities of this group, I also demonstrate how their particular lived experiences yield commonalities with respect to experiences described elsewhere in the literature. For example, a sense of the dangers of unemployment and the uncertainties that a secure paid job seemingly involved, such as the special considerations needed when planning a family, were overwhelmingly voiced in some accounts. Therefore the women's privileged positioning is conditioned by the new requirements: to be a 'winner' one must keep faith in the market metanarrative's foundational script—the liberated worker should be active, independent and flexible. In their decisions to become mothers, these women challenged the market metanarrative because they (willingly or not) failed to fit the model of the active, independent and flexible candidate for the job. Their struggle to find the happy medium between securing the 'gains' of the transformation and becoming mothers, reflects the deeply sedimented, complex and oppressive demands of the culturally sanctioned models of womanhood. This particular struggle, which is more likely to be a characteristic of these women rather than those not identified as the 'winners' of the transformation, becomes apparent in the way they engage with the ideal of the Polish coping mother. In their narrations, many of the participants invoked the idea of Matka Polka, illuminating the significance of this representation even if understood and interpreted in disparate ways. Interestingly, there was not a single question on Matka Polka in the interview schedule. The myth, however, served as a point of reference in some of the women's elaborations on the experiences of being a mother or as an identity that some women attempted to or felt they should claim.

Chapter 6 focuses specifically on the older cohort and Chapter 7 on the younger cohort. Both these chapters centre on data analysis based on the case study approach (Yin, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Basit, 2003). This approach offers a very detailed level of investigation enabling the internal conflicts and contradictions of narratives to be illuminated and addressed. These case studies have a twofold objective: they firstly offer a point of reference in my comparative analysis of the intergenerational shifts in the role of motherhood. Secondly, they demonstrate how the experiences of mothers perceived as the beneficiaries of the transformation, those who belonged to the younger cohort, can exemplify the impossibilities and conflicts inherent in the neoliberal expectations of the individual—in the case of mothers—glamorised through the image of the 'New Polish Woman'. The findings of this

analysis offer insights into the subtleties of individual lives of mothers living through the political, economic, social and cultural transformation. The thesis significantly contributes to a better understanding of how selves as mothers living in starkly contrasting political periods are narratively produced and understood.

Chapter 8 summarises and concludes the discussions developed throughout the thesis, outlining the contextual determinants, the impact of the transformation on mothering experiences in Poland and the cultural scripts of motherhood available to the groups of mothers chosen for this study. I demonstrate that through the shifts taking place in Poland since the collapse of the communist system some women's lives as mothers have been subjected to significant change. Capitalism arguably offers new opportunities, greater choice, more freedom, autonomy and options for individuals and has redefined the ways some women perceive motherhood, practice mothering, and narrate their experiences of being mothers. Their ability for self-reflexivity and identity construction through asserting practices of agency were captured through the narrative interviews. Yet, in their narrations these women drew on the culturally conditioned, deeply-rooted, and obdurate notions of 'appropriate' womanhood. In Poland, ideals of motherhood continue to demand a multiplicity of roles to be fulfilled by women bringing together their responsibilities as producers and reproducers. But ideals of the more liberated, independent individual epitomised in the image of the 'New Polish Woman' and modelled on constructions of womanhood promoted in other Western countries, present new opportunities and pressures too. The majority of the younger participants in this study could be seen to identify with elements of the new post-communist representation of womanhood influenced by neoliberal principles of individualism, self-realisation and control, and the analysis of the women's narratives exposed both the changes and continuities embedded in this novel representation.

Limitations of the Thesis

In this thesis I engage with contemporary discussions on women's lives in the post-communist environment.²¹ I argue that mothers' experiences of the transformation are still underexplored, marginalised and often unvoiced. The most analytically relevant vehicle for giving that voice to my specifically selected group of mothers is narrative analysis and a case study method. I have purposively focused on a small sample of twenty-four mothers from specific localities (geographical but also socio-economic) in order to be able to illuminate the specificities of this group and demonstrate how these highlight differences but

also commonalities between and with other groups of mothers living in post-communist Poland. Considered in economic terms, these women represent a significantly smaller group of the Polish population, yet according to economists investigating the post-communist milieu, it is their position that the majority of the society aspires to (Stępień, 2001). Importantly then, the particular lived experiences of these mothers offer an opportunity to analyse claims about their success. Whilst my analysis does not attempt to generalise the experiences of Polish mothers, it provides an in-depth interpretation of the experiences of a specific group of women living in urban environments, having higher levels of education and being relatively secure in their employment. As such, the findings of this thesis can serve as a point of reference for further research that can focus on the day-to-day realities of mothers from other social strata.

Consideration must be given to the fact that this thesis highlights only some aspects of the impact of the transformation on the lives of a specific group of Polish mothers, and this has significant implications for the claims raised here in regard to the cultural shifts. The validity of the narratives gathered and analysed provides many avenues for research and I am aware that this thesis is responsible for its own selective interpretation.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Foundation

Three main themes reverberate throughout this study and structure it: the post-communist transformation, the idea of narrative and the concept of motherhood. This chapter addresses them conceptually, offering theoretical frameworks for further discussion. Firstly, I explain the processes and consequences of the post-communist transformation, advocating the path-dependence approach to understanding the shifting power relations and post-1989 social reconfigurations. Secondly, I introduce the concepts of narrative and metanarrative providing the culturally specific examples of the narratives of the coping mother and the neoliberal metanarrative of the free market, drawing attention to the importance of individual experiences as influenced by the prevailing social discourses. Finally, I discuss the experiences of motherhood in communist and post-communist Poland, with their constraints and opportunities, as well as expectations and social representations propagated in both eras. This final section rounds up the theoretical discussion by demonstrating links between the transformation and motherhood as expressed through narrative. Thus, this chapter analyses the three major concepts of transformation, narrative and motherhood theoretically, demonstrating their significance for the discussion of the changing role of motherhood in Poland.

The Post-Communist Transformation

The post-communist transformation bore witness to major shifts in discourses and practices, redefining the meanings of the private and public spheres and bringing their values and understandings closer to how they are conceptualised in Western countries. The post-1989 transformation in Poland represented also profound challenges to the power structures, which are understood here in political terms as the formal institutions of the government, or, shortly, the state, and power relations, which are analysed in terms of the changing social structure. The notion of power is understood in this thesis then as relational dependence, hierarchy and asymmetry that exist between various (new and old) social groups that emerged in post-communist Poland and highlights the advantages enjoyed by those located

at what Poggi called 'the upper end of the asymmetry' (2006:466). It is explicitly illustrated here through a critical analysis of the dichotomous categorisation of the transformational 'losers' and 'winners'. This relation of power is present further on many levels and is discussed throughout this thesis as operating on the institutional, social and figurative levels, as well as in interpersonal relations, political and religious rhetoric, culture, and gendered mythology. The demands of the free market and the positioning of individuals in the new social structure in combination with the novel dominant representations have influenced people's ability to take advantage of greater choice and opportunity in uneven ways. Despite the assumptions of Western advisors that members of the post-communist societies would be able to and, more importantly, willing to act as active and creative agents in the new democratic reality, the shocks of the great political, economic, social and cultural transformations revealed unexpected complexities, pressures and tensions on both individual and social levels.

The extent to which individuals in the post-communist societies have been able to benefit from the new opportunities and possibilities provided by neoliberal discourses is better understood by examining how the transformation led to the reshaping of the social structure, altering meanings and categories of social life, and modifying the routines of everyday life. The communist reality, which largely regulated the life scripts of individuals in particular ways, meant that production, reproduction, and subjectivities were shaped in different ways from those experienced in the Western world. Generally speaking, the normative representation of the individual during the communist era saw people as embedded in networks of social relationships, interdependence and obligations towards the collective, and bearing responsibility towards others and the state. The individual was thus seen as motivated by social concerns and social goals rather than individual self-interest (Parvu, 2005:78-79). While competition was present, it was usually based on the ideas of solidarity. The citizen had the duty to work in order to fulfil the requirements of the centralised state economy and the state had the duty to provide for the citizen (Parvu, 2005). By dictating to people what they ought to think and believe, the communist state circumscribed the role of individuals turning them into social actors that were configured through tasks and images, such as 'mother' or 'worker', rather than individual agents. Gal and Klingman even argue that this paternalistic approach infantilised citizens of the communist countries (2000a:54).

Additionally, the economic realities of the communist context meant that many people relied on the traditional ways of organising their means of surviving by utilising links within the circles of friends and acquaintances, such as the family or local farmers who became an 'indispensable social resource' (Dölling, 1991:12; Watson, 1993a:480). Paid employment

was not always a source of independence as it is understood in a fully modern liberal market society; rather, for many, it was the family that offered individuals the feeling of relative autonomy (Gal and Kligman, 2000a; Grapard, 1997; Einhorn, 1993). The state-society distinction was not necessarily congruent with a public-private divide as understood in the West, because divisions and distinctions were based on inclusion or exclusion within the Party (Watson, 2000:203-204). The majority of the population organised itself in the opposition to the state prerogative and the private realm became a place where in certain specific ways both 'social' and 'private' spheres operated (Szacki, cited in Watson, 2000:203). The family and the household would for many Poles then become the place where both women and men engaged in activities in which they could use their imagination, initiative, and exercise (to a certain degree) their individual freedom (Grapard, 1997:671). Simultaneously, the state's social and institutional arrangements were taken for granted and secure employment often corrupted the work ethic.

The assumed homogenisation of individuals and individualities during the Soviet regime disappeared with the fall of communism, which brought new life styles, attitudes, values and norms while posing new expectations, demands and opportunities (Marková, 1997). After 1989 changes in the labour market with regard to the work regulations, ethic and quality control became re-defined by the features of the neoliberal form of capitalism introduced in Poland. These changes have become part of the great transformations of economies and people: notions of flexibility, responsiveness, accountability and self-regulation turned into a new discourse of the supposedly liberated worker (Dunn, 2004; Weiner, 2007). This new discourse stands in stark contrast with how the communist propaganda articulated and constructed the individual. In the new and competitive post-communist reality, not all social actors have been able, however, to successfully (as defined by the neoliberal discourses) exercise their agency. This is due to the fact that the power of the market dictates rules that some social groups are simply unable to follow. Agency required to actively seize new opportunities in order to reap the benefits of the new market economy links with social differentiation (Bradley, 2000) – for example, the human capital prerequisites such as education have privileged some men and women, and disadvantaged others, to engage with the emancipatory promise of the market metanarrative. But the extent to which the capacity to act within the neoliberal context can be exercised is also visibly marked in relation to women's roles as mothers whose access to the subsidised childcare has been dramatically reduced in the post-communist era.

The main signifiers of the post-communist transformation labelled as the 'return to Europe' have been capitalism and democracy (seen as the very 'essence' of the West), which

reflected global shifts but also exposed in a new light the existing polarity between the West and the East. The divide shaped the politics and power distribution during the Cold War, but also sustained and fostered the production of specific identities based on the practices of 'othering' (Syska, 2008). This 'othering' routinely positioned Eastern European countries as unstable, backward and in need of Western tutelage. One of the consequences was an almost unquestioned desirability of the values represented by the West, which resulted in the government's instant acceptance of financial assistance and economic guidance during the process of political and economic transformation. The models proposed and applied were often unsuitable to the countries who were offered Western aid but the lingering Cold War mentality, which positioned Eastern Europe as the wayward brother of the West, rationalised the expansion of Western interests and ignored the interests, complexities and realities of the nations involved in the transformation (ibid.) According to the majority of studies on the post-communist condition, the contemporary West-East relationship represents a clearly defined relation of power: that is, the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 carried with it the rhetoric of the triumph of Western values, ideas, and institutions (Gray, 1993:26; Schrecker, 2004; Syska, 2008). Thus, the West has been situated as the winner of modern history and the East as the loser (Parvu, 2005). The now classic statement by Fukuyama (1992) about the 'end of history' reflects the discursive positioning of the communist collapse as the final stage in the evolution of history, consequently repositioning and redefining the West as the sole and definitive alternative for a free and successful life.

The presumption that Western standards would and should be applied in the process of the change in the East has only reinforced Western dominance in the 'New World Order' (Watson, 2000:189). The assumed legitimacy of the Western world as the one that is developed, civilised, and prosperous in comparison with the backwardness of Eastern Europe illuminates the hegemonic articulations that have shaped and defined the changes in Poland, as well as other countries in the region (see e.g. Stukuls, 1999:539; Syska, 2008). Such hegemonic articulations signify 'the maintenance of inequality and domination through both ideological and material means' (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989:6). This, in turn, demonstrates the dynamics of the post-communist changes in the former Soviet Bloc countries and illuminates the asymmetry between the West and the East. Hegemony then is understood in this thesis as an articulation that refers to the field of politics and the construction of a new culture that affects individuals at various levels shaping their identities, social relations, sexuality, the construction of the private, forms of entertainment, aesthetics and pleasure (Laclau, 1990:189). The assumption that the particular socio-political

arrangements of the West are superior and advanced when compared with the East circumscribes the dynamics of the post-communist transformation: that neoliberal capitalist notions have become the most appropriate measures to be applied to re-building post-socialist societies. The logic of the market with its liberal-individualist, competitive, striving, autonomous and democratic core has located the post-communist person as deficient in these qualities and in need of Western guidance. The discourses of backwardness and primitivism of Eastern Europe support the position in the 'narrative of Westernisation as progress' (Watson, 2000:200).

Two theoretical approaches predominate in scholars' interpretations of the social changes characterising the post-communist world: the modernisation approach and the path-dependence approach. The first one, based on classical modernisation theory, assumes that the trajectory of transformation takes place from a lesser to a more advanced stage ultimately reaching a democratic and capitalist end and links with the concept of 'transition' (Weiner, 2007:16; Gal and Kligman, 2000a:10). The path-dependence approach, on the other hand, is more sympathetic towards the complex, vast, often confusing and dramatic implications that the Eastern European transformation had for individual lives.

The path-dependence approach more effectively links with the theories of 'transformation', which recognise the continuities with the past and which I use in my analysis of the changes. The concepts of 'transition' and 'transformation' are sometimes used interchangeably in some of the literature on the post-communist context. The differentiation between these two concepts is relevant here as there are significant disparities that importantly shape the ways the shifts could be theorised. For example, the concept of 'transformation' acknowledges, as noted by the eminent Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka, 'the process as a more complex, path-dependent, and an open ended construction of a new form of society, partly patterned on the West, but also revealing specific historical experiences of the region' (2006:456). The notion of 'transition' on the other hand 'assumes that we witness the simple replacement of one regime by another' (Sztompka, 2006:456). By implying an 'unproblematic trajectory and a destination that is known', the concept of 'transition' exposes the oversimplification of the complex processes at stake in the political, economic, cultural and social shifts in the Eastern European countries (Watson, 2000:186). Furthermore, as noted by Susan Gal and Gail Kligman (2000a), the metaphor of 'transition' seems to be indicating the progress from one well-known 'stage' of history to another. This, in turn, invokes the Cold War mentality, with one side of the divide seen as more advanced and forward, and the other needing to catch up. With the collapse of the communist systems, the West continues to hold the political power (Parvu, 2005; Browning, 2000). The term 'transformation', as noted by

Watson, is then more 'non-committal' and 'can "speak for itself", if only we restrict ourselves to the role of neutral observer. The events themselves will then tell us what is really going on' (2000:186). Sociologist David Lane's definition offers a comprehensive view of what has been at stake in the process of the transformation:

The term transformation is the process by which the former state socialist societies, which rejected Communist Party hegemony and a planned centrally directed economy, embarked on major changes of their political, economic, social and legal institutions. It is problematic whether they were inspired by any revolutionary theory or led by a revolutionary class. Essentially, these movements had one thing in common: they 'rejected' communism, but the degree of renunciation varied both between countries and between different aspects of 'communism' (2002:3).

The idea of the rejection of communism is further developed by political scientist Leslie Holmes (1997). Holmes, whose main research interest has been the post-communist context in Central and Eastern Europe, employs the notion of rejection to conceptualise what came after the collapse of communist regimes. He argues that the post-communist environment can be best explained through an analogy of various rejections: of what was perceived as an external domination; of the specific power structures that was represented by communism; of democratic centralism and other formal aspects of the system; of the mendacity, hypocrisy, elitism, corruption, incompetence and deteriorating performance of communists (1997:14).

The idea of post-communism is difficult to conceptualise as it is a diverse, complex and multilayered phenomenon, and can possibly be best understood as the collective refusal to further subscribe to communist ideals and power in a broad sense. Polish-American political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski, was one of the first to attempt to conceptualise it when he wrote that

a post communist system [is] one in which the withering away of communism has advanced to the point that neither Marxist theory nor past communist practice dictate much—if—any of ongoing public policy ... a system in which self-declared 'communists' just do not treat communist doctrine seriously as the guide to social policy ... (1989:252).²²

Jadwiga Staniszkis, one of the leading sociologists in Poland who acted as an advisor for *Solidarność*, sees post-communism as a set of events that commenced at the time when

the exhaustion of real socialism [transpired], ... when it was no longer possible to resolve the crisis within the existing system on account of lack of material and symbolic reserves and of institutional freedom of manoeuvre ..., [and when applying the] measures that could reduce

tensions [would mean going] beyond the existing system and violating its identity (1991:1-2).

The post-communist milieu, as noted by Staniszkis, is consequential to the 'exhaustion' of communism but is also informed by it. This is visible in the way the transformation is contextually contingent on the past embodying both regress and progress (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999). It is in such conceptualisations of the changes that the path-dependency approach recognises the institutional and ideological legacies from the past and their imprints on people's lives and identities. The presumption that the removal of the coercive powers of a totalitarian state would simply be replaced by Western institutions implies the creation of the 'new' that happens in a *tabula rasa* environment (Lane, 2002; Stępień, 2001; Stark, 1992). Yet, in reality only some of the elements of the old structure are replaced with new elements, while some old parts persist, and others are re-configured. This pattern also concerns self-identities: they too are challenged and evolve in processes of profound and complex changes. The shape of the new is determined by the past and the legacy of old arrangements, but it is also being influenced by the visions of the future.

In his now classic critique of 'dependency theory', Tony Smith makes a similar point in relation to the 'turbulent seventies' in the South (or non-communist industrialised countries of Latin America), arguing that the global political heritage of the 'West' (i.e. the United States) cannot be univocally applied to political and economic modernisation in other countries (1979:247-248). The dominance of this global political heritage of the West is better understood through the 'world systems theory', which presupposes the worldwide labour productivity as determined by the core capitalist countries (Wallerstein, 2004). As I have demonstrated earlier, in the Polish context the dominance of the West has been illuminated through the implementation of 'shock therapy' and its neoliberal ideals promoted by various Western agencies (e.g. the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank or the NATO) as an inevitable and desirable course of action dictated by the logic of global capital. Building on 'dependency theory', 'world systems theory' structures societies in unbalanced ways: into peripheral, semi-peripheral and those who developed a capitalist core (Wallerstein, 1979; 1984). The international division of labour defines the peripheral positions through the notions of poverty and backwardness. Through the discourse of backwardness, the former Soviet Bloc countries are compared and assessed to what the West sees as the norm, reinforcing hierarchical positioning and the peripheral status of the countries of the Soviet Bloc. Yet, the 'shock therapy' or the idea of a smooth transition into the Western ideal does not recognise the local socio-economic formations of the ex-Soviet republics including Poland (Verdery, 1996). Similarly, Smith (1979) argues

that every socio-economic formation cannot, and should not, be understood simply as a part of the 'world system' because each country has its particular internal characteristics that form part of each country's structure. The introduction of the new capitalist system on the post-communist ground is ultimately taking place in a context 'where the lessons of forty years of experimentation by a rational hand have made the citizenry cautious about big experiments' (Stark, 1992:19). In addition, for the first time in forty years it is argued the majority of the citizens can be heard and indeed 'want a voice' in determining the new structures (ibid). Those internal characteristics must always be considered because the individuals who attempt to use the novel opportunities offered by the new order almost always find that their choices are in some way constrained by the old arrangements. The path-dependence approach, which recognises continuities with the past, offers then a more inclusive way of examining the intricate implications that the transformation has had for individual lives.

But as well as examining the enduring elements of previous periods it is also important to consider power structures and dynamics which underpin the transformation in Poland. Economic and political structures always powerfully shape individual lives. During the communist era the economy was controlled but also generously supported by the socialist state, which offered its citizens free healthcare, schooling and childcare, food and housing subsidies as well as guaranteed employment. Membership in the ruling class was clearly linked to Party membership and secured privileges not available to those outside of the party circle. The state ideology favoured the working class as the backbone of the society, which levelled social differences and provided a common denominator for defining individual needs through one collective identity of the socialist worker.

There were certain inconsistencies in the communist ideology as applied within the Polish context. Despite the official disregard for private property as initiated through failed post-war nationalisation, the largest social group in Poland was represented by private peasantry.²³ This private peasantry existed within what Gorlach (1993) called 'repressive tolerance'—a situation where the private peasants were afforded a degree of independence (in terms of maintaining private property) while their economic activity was subordinated to the state's planning and price controls. Paradoxically, their special position (again linked with private property, relative independence, and the sheer numbers of this class) under communism did not result in a special treatment in the new market economy. The first thing the state did after the transformation was to remove subsidies which resulted in a sharp decline of this sector due to the price increases and ultimately meant that this 'strange class' suffered the greatest economic losses (Kocik, 1996:124).

This peculiar situation of private peasantry in Poland under communism had important ramifications in terms of the social structure. Due to the state's discriminatory agricultural policies that favoured collective farms as opposed to private farmers, many private peasant families were forced to undertake additional employment. In practice, this meant that the man either joined the collective farming or worked outside of the agricultural sector altogether in order to financially support their families. This had significant implications for the family structure and the woman's role in it. She was the one who stayed on the farm and took over the husbandry of the farm. In the case of women with children this meant combining responsibilities traditionally associated with mothering alongside economic activity linked with running the farm. It contributed heavily to the cultural expectations of the motherly double-burden and the idea of the coping mother, which is at the forefront of this thesis.

The state's 'repressive tolerance' (Gorlach, 1993) meant that the private peasantry in Poland was in effect abandoned by the state (which favoured collective farms) and left with little support beyond free healthcare and schooling. The lack of access to and subsidies for better technologies meant that private peasants used traditional, often obsolete and inefficient ways of farming. This left them in a disadvantaged position, contributing to growing economic disparities between farmers, with the state-encouraged growth of cities in Poland additionally increasing differences on the rural-urban line. These inequalities became more dramatically apparent after the fall of communism. The loss of the paternalistic state, which oppressed private peasants politically and economically but at the same time guaranteed a certain degree of security (e.g. private peasants were forced to sell their crops to state-run agricultural agencies which always guaranteed sales), was additionally augmented by the sense of helplessness and confusion of this class. The most profound illustration of the initial inability to adjust to the free market economy and its neoliberal discourse was the fact that rural areas in Poland were hit hardest by unemployment and poverty after the transformation.

In addition to the private peasantry which represented an oddity within the communist ideology of state-run economy, collectivism and classless society, another incongruous and officially absent group was a capitalist class supported by a system of informal relationships and networks (Hardy, 2009:48). The existence of this class contradicts the 'homogeneity paradigm' according to which communist societies were 'composed of amorphous and largely undifferentiated mass [and] minuscule political elite who thoroughly monopolised all forms of power' (Fuller, 2000:585).²⁴ A large division existed between intellectuals, workers and private peasantry. Despite the doctrine of a classless society, communist societies were

characterised by the complex nature of social ties, hierarchies, and power. As an illustration, the concept of *blat* exchange (from Russian)—parallel with the Polish *układy* (or *znajomości* meaning connections)—has been used by Alena Ledeneva to convey aspects of the lived everyday existence of the shortage-ridden society:

Blat was an exchange of 'favours of access' in conditions of shortages and a state system of privileges ... It served the needs of personal consumption and reorganised the official distribution of material welfare. *Blat* exchange was often mediated and covered by the rhetoric of friendship or acquaintance: 'sharing', 'helping out', 'friendly support', 'mutual care', etc. Intertwined with personal networks, *blat* provided access to public resources through personal channels (1998:37).

Układy were an intrinsic and widespread part of everyday practice in communist Poland (Pine, 1998:115). Scarce goods were obtained through *układy*, queues were jumped and essential products such as food, clothing and petrol purchased through the back door (Parvu, 2005:17-20). The months-long waiting lists for furniture, domestic appliances or cars, and the years-long waiting lists for the allocation of accommodation could be jumped. Access to medical specialists or treatments as well as better attention and care in hospitals (through recommendation), obtaining a passport or a place in the nursery could be arranged through *układy*. Such informal ways of organising the everyday life of a family had important implications for the ways some mothers could or could not utilise these networks. Significantly, these informal practices had a significant impact on the forms of social stratification and occupational prestige. These networks operated on the horizontal level (between people of the same status), but there were also vertical ties between people from different social strata. As one could have access to scarce resources without a basic educational background and regardless of material situation, it meant that the social implications of certain occupations had an added dimension of power. A common example was an assistant in a butcher's shop: the social position of that person was defined by the actual resources she or he commanded. Better access to food and the powerful position of the shop assistant as the distributor of material goods meant that she or he could potentially enjoy a better lifestyle than for instance an engineer. Thus, holding specific positions that provided access to certain resources as well as knowing the 'right' people and getting the 'right' information (for example about the delivery of goods) were crucial elements of everyday life under the communist regime. Attaining such workaday positions of power heavily influenced social relations, positions and hierarchies and blurred the lines of formal stratification.

While some of the 'ordinary' citizens had access to the preferential treatment through the system of *układy* (which allowed them to obtain otherwise unobtainable goods such as meat, coffee or domestic appliances), the actual beneficiaries of this system of favouritism were individuals occupying the highest echelons of the Party structures. Their special position enabled them to gain access to resources beyond basic goods and services over which the struggle continued in the lower levels of the society. This also offered them access to knowledge, resources and privileges securing their elite and powerful standing in the social structure. Ironically, the property rights of private peasantry did not translate into wealth in the post-communist Poland while the capitalist class retained its privileged position, making their economic status under communism a more certain predictor of financial success than belonging to the official political ruling class linked with Party membership. Ultimately, the interests of the supposedly new capitalist class in Poland expanded onto the global business arena securing their place in the transnational capitalist class (Hardy, 2009:51).

To sum up, contrary to the official ideology of a classless society, clear divisions existed in terms of economic, social and cultural assets to which members of these unrecognised classes had access. Despite the general presumptions and the party's propaganda, the 'grey mass' was in fact diversified with various social groups maintaining some degrees of power. These class divisions carried a degree of power under the communist system that did not necessarily translate straightforwardly into the new post-communist power structures.

The transformation from the centrally planned economy to capitalism required that the role of the state be reduced making room for the market forces driven by neoliberalism, new economic relations and political processes to take over. In the post-communist era the state was no longer required or expected to provide plans for the economy, subsidies for consumer goods and free services for the citizens. As a consequence, the state became less apparent and its role, more fluid and 'not interventionist' when compared with the previous era (Harvey, 2007:69). When the communist Poland collapsed, the clear divide between 'us' (the society) and 'them' (the ruling power) was substituted by a diverse group of parties, associations, lobbies and civic organisations that dispersed the meaning of power and those who held and had the access to power. In addition, positioned within the market metanarrative, the state's autonomy has been shaped and circumscribed by the global dominant neoliberal discourse powerfully influencing the ways in which individuals are able to engage with notions such as autonomy, freedom and choice dominating the new post-communist environment.

The role of the state within neoliberal ideology is to foster the free market as an essential element of the individual right to freedom of action, expression and choice but still within powerful and influencing structures (Harvey, 2007:64). Initiatives such as privatisation of assets, deregulation of state-run sectors and encouraging competition are designed to reduce costs and increase efficiency and productivity. The neoliberal principles of personal responsibility and accountability define individuals' actions and permeate the realms of welfare, education and healthcare. However, as any analysis of neoliberal ideology in the Polish context has shown, these premises tend to be elitist in the way they link personal success or failure with investing in education and rely on social capital and power. The rapid shifts that accompanied the 'shock therapy' in Poland, as opposed to the slow and incremental changes of key economy sectors in other Western countries, dramatically exposed individual incompetencies and inability to conform to the new system causing vast stress within the society inhibited by the paternalistic communist system as a whole and resulting in unprecedented social problems. Increased individual responsibility and the diminished social role of the state in terms of welfare and consumer subsidies resulted in unparalleled poverty and hard to control unemployment (Shields, 2009: 170).

The dramatic consequences of the transformation have had crucial implications for the changes in the social structure but are also illuminated by the constraints of the past. For example, the features of the so-called new poverty in Poland which emerged following the transformation to capitalism are strongly shaped by the social processes that had taken place in the past (Tarkowska, 2001). The contemporary deprivation and marginalisation of certain categories of Poles are linked with the social mobility that was an actual consequence of two transformations: the imposition of the communist system in 1945 and then its subsequent collapse in 1989 (Domański, 2000a). The first transformation was signified by the great macro-structural processes of extensive industrialisation, collectivisation of agriculture, and nationalisation of major industries. Then, the economic privatisation of the 1990s caused major reshuffles of the social structure that were underpinned by deep changes in the economy and in occupational distribution (Domański, 2000a:30). New opportunities brought about by privatisation were advanced mostly by those individuals and groups that already possessed superior cultural and social capital and not the working class and the peasantry that had been actively promoted within the educational and occupational system during the communist era, illuminating the Poland-specific historical context of the post-communist economic inequalities.

Social differentiation in post-communist Poland is far more multifaceted than before the post-1989 shifts. Exposing the real complexities of the transformation, class, gender, age and

geographical location intertwine to produce complex and intricate forms of new social hierarchies and power relations, which are much more diverse than the dichotomous categorisations of 'winners/losers' used in many post-communist studies. For many individuals living in the post-communist societies, their new surroundings feel inadequate and uncomfortable as the landscape of their everyday life has been deeply altered. The new vocabulary of the market and economic transformation resulted in high anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed. As noted by Michael Thomas, the 'entire scaffolding of normal routines, trusted assumptions and certainties has collapsed, whose intrinsically equivocal nature nevertheless provided a basis for stabilised everyday habits' (cited in Karagiannis, 2007:148). Even for those who could be seen as the successful agents in the new post-communist reality, the demands of capitalism with its competitiveness, long working hours and uncertainty about the future circumscribed the context in which these individuals can exercise their agency. The confines of the market, linked with neoliberal ideals, reveal a problem of ontological 'uncertainty of future' that characterises the Western model of the consumption society and to which the Polish transformation subscribed (Ritzer, 2000).

The fall of communism and the subsequent changes prompted redefinitions of the forms of stratification and power distribution in Eastern European societies. In Poland, sociologists have put forward the political capitalism thesis in an attempt to conceptualise the reshuffling of the social structure after 1989 and to demonstrate how the form of capitalism taking place (especially in Poland and Hungary) is constructed from elements of the old social arrangements²⁵ (Staniszki, 1991; Stark, 1990, 1992). According to this thesis, taking the heritage of the past into consideration as opposed to focusing on the *tabula rasa* approach allows the post-communist societies to be built on elements of 'the old, imported ideas, and indigenous innovations' (Eyal *et al.*, 1997:68). This explains how some of the new economic systems, democratic orders, and chosen forms of capitalism began to unfold in their own specific ways, distinct from the social arrangements and norms that define Western European capitalism. This conceptual approach towards the effects of the post-communist transformation on the various recipients of the change also enables the continuance of the arrangements from the previous system to be recognised.

The economic, political and cultural changes that constitute the post-communist transformation have all been signified by the shifts in the emerging power relationships: the new democratic order replaced the communist regime and the capitalist free market replaced the command economy. These structural changes on the macro level have redefined the values, demands, and opportunities open to individuals. These reconfigurations, determined by the logic of the market metanarrative, required the creation of 'new kinds of persons and

subjectivities' (Dunn, 2004:6). The new norms that dictate the rules of the capitalist economic relations shape behaviours of individuals within this new system and influence personal narratives. The way this influence becomes illuminated in personal narratives is visible through the interpretations of the market as an apparent source of liberation for all. Such interpretations enable some groups to appropriate it as their own 'liberatory tales' (Weiner, 2007:20).

Narrative

The idea of narrative is woven throughout this thesis informing and shaping the theoretical, conceptual and empirical aspects of my work. I use narrative in two ways: as a means through which selves gain sense and then as an overarching metanarrative that illuminates the ways in which individuals are able to narrate their personal experiences (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; The Personal Narratives Group, 1989; McAdams, 1993; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Miller, 2005). A detailed account of my methodological approach is documented in Chapter 4. Below, I address some of its underlying philosophical foundations and examine the grand narratives within which the personal narratives of my participants are located.

A broad consensus exists amongst social scientists that identities are 'constructed' and not pre-existing.²⁶ In this thesis, I examine the ways in which aspects of selves are narratively constructed. Traditionally, narrative has a linguistic foundation (Toolan, 2001) but more recently ideas about narrative have been refocused from language to include experience, shifting the significance of narrative enquiry within social sciences (Squire, 2008:54). This is partly due to the growing interest in subjectivities and individual actions and in the ways they are constructed and conditioned (Miller, 2005:8-9). According to Ricoeur (1984), the 'life story' is the fundamental mode through which the grounding of human experience over time is understood. During the narration of events and experiences individuals can feel compelled to try to make sense of them and attempt to impose order in their narrations to produce coherent and 'recognisable' accounts (Miller, 2005). There are various approaches towards theorising narrative but Ricoeur (1991) links the notion with temporality, and this way 'coherence' and 'change' are facilitated and accounted for at the same time. Because individuals cannot articulate their actual temporality, their 'being in time' directly, they mediate this experience indirectly via narrative. As noted by McNay, this primary position of narrative in subject's constitution allows for a theory of a durable, persistent and stable

self, which is nevertheless not immutable, retaining the ability to change over time (2000:88). Such a theoretical base offers an opportunity to link subject formation with agency: the construction of a coherent self-identity over time is an active process which entails the reconfiguration and reordering of past experiences (Armstrong, 2002:42). The very act of 'giving form' to a whole or considerable part of life requires agency from the author to account for why and how any individual experience has shaped their life and their life's narrative in a particular way (The Personal Narratives Group, 1989:4). Individuals make sense of their lives by organising their stories in time and therefore 'time becomes human time to the extent it is organised after the manner of narrative; narrative in turn is meaningful to the extent it portrays the features of temporal existence' (McAdams, 1997:30).

Importantly, any discussion of agency must be located within the context of material and social forces; whilst the subject is the narrator of their own story, according to Ricoeurian understanding, the narrator is not the author of their life. The Personal Narratives Group, in their important work on the narrative research, offers a Marxist interpretation that illuminates this claim in relation to women's lives: 'women make their own lives (and life histories) but they do so under conditions not of their own choosing' (1989:5). The social constructions of motherhood encroach on women's lives but they are also shaped by individual agency. This focus on narrative in subjectivity formation means that the subject is both active in negotiating the relationship between 'embodied particularity and material relations', between the personal and the social, yet still subservient to the pervasive influence of hegemony (McNay, 2000:16). For example in the study which unfolds, some of the younger participants in my research were able to engage with the market metanarrative and present themselves as active and fulfilled workers in the public sphere. Yet, at the same time the way they narrated their experiences as mothers was influenced by the patriarchal and traditional definitions of motherhood that conflate womanhood with motherhood. State-supported representations of motherhood, which promulgate the image of a devoted and coping mother, circumscribe the ways in which the majority of women feel they should mother. This was certainly the case with many participants of this study whose narrative accounts exposed internal contradictions and complexities. For example, amongst the younger cohort some narrative threads revealed mothers who appeared satisfied with their lives, whilst others exposed (a reality of social and domestic) struggles with this seemingly contented image of satisfaction and fulfilment.

Narrative can be foundational of selfhood but not totalising because there are always elements of experience that prove elusive within a given culture. For example, the ideals that

define the concept of a 'good mother' within a given cultural context will most certainly circumscribe the ways in which the experiences of becoming a mother can be narrated. The longitudinal research on women's experiences of first time motherhood by Miller (2005) in the U.K., exposes how the unexpected and/or difficult aspects of new mothering may lead to women silencing and concealing their actual experiences because they do not appear to coincide with the historically, socially, culturally, politically, and morally shaped ideals of motherhood. Thus, whilst narrative construction reveals individual agency and allows for flux and diversity, individual narratives remain constrained by social structures by being embedded, embodied, localised, subject to systems of power, oppression, exploitation, and structural elements of individual's environment such as values and beliefs.²⁷ Individual modes of perception, thoughts and actions are shaped and structured through learning and experience, ensuring that social action is performed in an organised and routine way that corresponds with the cultural and social legacy of the particular context in which an individual lives (Crosley, 2001; Swartz, 1998; Bourdieu, 1984). The way individuals are able to narrate and make sense of their subjectivities is thus highly context dependent, locally circumscribed and confined by culturally sanctioned metanarratives, such as the market metanarrative and the concept of the coping mother explored in this research project.

The way individuals realise themselves is then disciplined by social structures and power relations on the macro and micro levels. Socioeconomic stratification and social institutions pattern social arrangements in terms of locality and influence individuals' agency. For example, in the context of the post-communist transformation the varied consequences of the shifts have reshaped the social structure in ways that enabled some to reap the benefits of the free market whilst considerably disadvantaging other groups. This had significant repercussions for those who live in the impoverished areas and how they are able (or rather not) to exercise agency. In addition, the actions of individuals are also shaped on the micro level by the norms governing particular social systems. Hence, different groups of individuals will be influenced in various and often uneven ways, which also differs between cultures. Culture is then one of the main constituents in the ways individuals are able (or not) to construct narratives. As noted by Frank, 'people tell their own unique stories, but they compose these stories by adapting and combining narrative types that culture makes available' (1997:75). Since people make sense of their lives through stories that are available to them, individual narratives are representations of personal experiences, past and present, and are constructed by employing the prevailing public, social and cultural stories (Richardson, 1990; Somers and Gibson, 1994). Individuals employ narratives available to them while making sense of their lives. The production of individual narratives is then

fuelled and shaped by those stories that constitute different larger narratives and metanarratives. Metanarratives are grand and all-encompassing stories that attempt to capture universal properties of social life and operate usually beyond our awareness (Somers and Gibson, 1994:63).

Two grand narratives influence my work: the metanarrative of the free market and the continually evolving concept of the coping mother. I treat them as the main shaping forces for the personal narratives produced by the women I interviewed (Morrissey, 2003:7).²⁸ I borrow the idea of the market metanarrative from Elaine Weiner whose analysis of the experiences of Czech women during their period of transformation is located within a theoretical understanding of the market as a 'mental model informed by particular cultural and political referents' (2007:6). Weiner argues that considering the workings of the free market as a discourse in the post-communist milieu, rather than as a place where the trading, buying, and selling of goods and services takes place, offers an opportunity to view the market not only as something 'out there' but rather as integrated into the very self. Subsequently, the ideological manifestation of the market expressed via discourse takes the shape of a narrative or, rather, an internalised metanarrative. The authority of the metanarrative 'conceals patterns of domination and submission' and in times of social upheavals can become a power resource for the political leaders (Mishler, 1995:115). After the collapse of the communist system the free market metanarrative developed into a 'publicly espoused metastory' aimed at convincing the general public in the former Soviet Bloc countries about the merits and requisites of a free market economy (Weiner, 2007:6).

The data analysis in the later chapters of this thesis has been informed by generic discourses on motherhood that link maternal work with women's biological capacities to reproduce apparent natural and intuitive skills to care for children. In the examination of women's narratives I also employ the myth of Matka Polka as an illustration of the larger metanarrative of the coping mother, rooted in the nineteenth century romantic ideals of womanhood. The idea of the coping mother emerged as a dominant theme in the data analysis becoming an important element in how the women narrated their experiences. During communism the concept of the coping working mother often helped women to make sense of their social roles, served as a readily available identity option (glorified by the party and thus state supported), and offered women a form of feminism by granting special value and substance to their roles as mothers. The post-1989 political and economic shifts have significantly altered the understanding and interpretations of the concept of the coping mother: transformations in state policies and institutional practices diminished the role of the state in a similar measure as the Western values and morality did (capitalism, democracy,

individuality). Yet, significantly, in contemporary Poland being a coping mother, or even calling oneself 'Matka Polka', continues to have a bearing on women's lives in new as well as old and enduring ways. Interestingly, for the great majority of women it is the myth of Matka Polka that remains a popular mental shortcut and an almost inescapable point of reference. Regardless of women's social position, economic situation or their views, attitudes and behaviours, they are socially pressured to acknowledge this powerful cultural archetype and position themselves in relation to it, even if unwittingly and in different ways with varying levels of recognition. Matka Polka, as a facile expression of the concept of the coping mother, exists in the social consciousness and discursive practices, subsists in the national literature and permeates the entire educational system (Walczevska, 2000; Ostrowska, 2004). The power of the myth has been experienced by many women in communist Poland who were socialised into the role of the coping mother by their mothers and now socialise their daughters into its principles. This legacy has shaped and continues to influence constructions of motherhood and women's experiences. The myth of Matka Polka was tainted by communist rhetoric and it sometimes has a pejorative and derisory connotation (Szwajcowska, 2006; Budrowska, 2000). Yet, Matka Polka, while an analytically ambiguous concept, remains a significant part of verbalising perceptions of women coping as mothers and doing 'good' mothering. Even when the cracks in the ideology of the myth are evident, women are still often compelled to discursively situate themselves in relation to the myth.

The constructions of selves are then conditioned by various intersecting factors such as class, gender, age and ethnicity. As much research has shown, mothering is undoubtedly experienced in different ways by different women in different cultures.²⁹ In the Polish context, mothering is experienced according to women's geographical locations and different socio-economic positions. These variables notably shape individual claims and assumptions about the consequences of the transformation and its effect on ideals of motherhood in Poland.

Motherhood

My conceptualisation of the 'Polish mother' considers a set of notions on motherhood that are globally cross-cultural but also Poland specific. The cross-cultural and often universal discourses around motherhood invoke someone who has a child and cares for that child.³⁰ Motherly care includes nurturing and raising children, which is linked with economic

responsibilities and social duties that include providing a role model and ensuring the transfer of tradition and knowledge. The economic aspect reveals the levels of state's engagement in supporting childcare: this is illustrated for example by the degree to which the state offers support for mothers in providing (or not) subsidies to nurseries and kindergartens. The lack of such subsidies in the post-communist era significantly reshapes and stratifies the experience of being a mother in Poland as compared with the communist times. The transmission of knowledge is inextricably linked with the local culture, rhetoric, mythology, power relations, and, in Poland, also with the Catholic Church. The intertwining of these aspects urges specific versions of motherhood that are locally circumscribed although individually experienced.³¹

There are various ideologies regarding the ideal of the 'good mother' which are shifting and also context dependent—historically, socially and culturally—and thus circumscribed by local understandings of what it means to mother. In many societies, the ideology of motherhood is oppressive to women by demanding sacrifices of health, complete dedication, and relinquishment of ambitions, passions, and selves (Meyers, 2001; Haste, 2001). In the Western world, the prevailing concept of the 'good mother' embodies ideals linked with complete selfless devotion to the home realm, child-caring and rearing (see e.g. Oakley, 1979, 2002; Hays, 1996; Warner, 2006). Research by Caroline Gatrell demonstrates for example that Western women often struggle with feelings of guilt when re-entering the workforce once having had children (2005:43-70). Such representations of the 'good mother' link with an ideology of 'intensive mothering', which is a gendered model that expects women to dedicate themselves fully to child rearing (Hays, 1996:x). This obviously stands in stark contrast to the neoliberal ideology driving Western societies with its discourses of autonomy, self-fulfilment, and self-interested gain, which can be oppressive for many women.

In Poland, the communist era shaped the constructions of motherhood in a specific way: through the evocations of gender equality, facilitation of women's entry into the labour force and promotion of the model of the working mother. Being a working mother became the main precondition of 'proper womanhood': the pressures exerted on Polish mothers by socio-cultural contexts to seamlessly reconcile reproduction and production, often had religious and patriotic undertones. The Polish mother has been someone who is most importantly able to cope with whatever life throws at her. The post-communist transformation has diversified what might have been seen as a relatively unified experience during the communist era. As I have noted earlier, the state's withdrawal from supporting women in their roles as working mothers and the reductions in, or disappearance of,

subsidies in childcare have restructured the realities of being a mother in Poland today. The introduction of the free market, underlined by the neoliberal expectations not only in regard to economies but also to people, creates new pressures for many Polish women. Previously seen as a 'natural' part of a woman's life, structured and relatively well supported, the experience of becoming a mother today takes place within a new, often uncertain, sometimes stressful and anxiety driven environment. This uncertainty was often voiced by the participants of this study in their accounts of mothering in the post-communist era.

My understanding of the role and experiences of a mother is greatly influenced by Sara Ruddick's (1989) work on maternal thinking. Ruddick's conceptualisations offer an excellent explanation of the dynamics between power and agency in the context of maternal work, which is helpful in thinking about the shifts and continuities in the lives of Polish mothers. In my work, being a 'mother' is linked primarily with the practical dimensions of the role that are both biologically and socially inflected. This practice of being a mother is culturally shaped. So, whilst seeing a mother as someone who takes upon herself the responsibility of childcare and commits herself to 'meeting demands that define maternal work' (Ruddick, 1989:17), I assign critical value to the fact that these demands are highly contextual and culturally specific. In her commitment, a mother accepts, or is at least aware of the standards set by the socially developed and publicly governed concepts and values that embody the meaning of the mother in a particular social milieu. Ruddick lists three main categories of the demands that constitute maternal work—'preservation', 'growth', and 'social acceptability' (1989:17). Through these requirements, which are imposed on anyone doing maternal work, the control over the specific ways in which the practice is exercised becomes apparent. Whilst the demand for preservation and growth are more cross-cultural, the demand for social acceptability, or what counts as acceptable, varies enormously within and amongst groups and cultures.

Constructions of motherhood in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc during the communist era were based on the Marxist principles of emancipation as understood by the majority of women: the combining of both production and reproduction. Thus, the cultural representation of what is acceptable, and what is not, in women's roles as mothers was determined by a similar logic. Culture largely determines what will count as an appropriate way of bringing up a child and what constitutes being a 'good mother'. The ideal version of motherhood in the Eastern European countries has been the doubly-burdened woman. Eastern European motherhood is then a construction specific to the former communist countries that have more recently subscribed to similar ideals as those in the West. Meeting rigid demands of the promoted model of a working mother, women contribute both the

productive and reproductive labour to the state, which then acts as a patriarch in the way it supports its mothers in meeting the demands of their dual role. These conceptualisations of state patriarchy expose the duality of the notion where both public and private patriarchy is constitutive of women's discrimination – a subject of considerable discussion among Western feminists (Walby, 1990; 1997; Lopata, 1993; Pateman, 1988).³²

Whilst constructions of motherhood in Poland have been influenced by the communist past there are specifically local understandings of what constitutes a 'good mother'. These local understandings are often circumscribed by the sexist positioning of women and logics that conflate womanhood with woman's 'natural' role of a mother. The local culture-specific ideals of a 'good mother' in Poland are still saturated with the knightly ethos and romantic ideals of womanhood. Many researchers have shown that these constructs are discriminatory and marginalise women who do not live up to its standards (Janion, 2006a; 2006b; Walczewska, 2000; Szwajcowska, 2006; Graff, 2003a; 2003b). As noted by McNay, patterns of discrimination and exclusion are usually 'deeply sedimented, complex and reproduced' (2000:14). Traditionally rooted ideals of femininity such as feebleness, obedience and innocence are still reinforced in Poland through masculine acts: women's hands are kissed, they are let through doors first, and offered seats in crowded places. Yet, this chivalrous behaviour is inscribed in the dominant role held by Polish men. The philosopher and leading Polish feminist Magdalena Środa argues that such manners only underline and validate men's superior roles as they do not represent any women's rights but rather stand as a form of favours offered by men to women, favours which because given can also be taken away (2009:38). Other numerous examples of the sexist nature of the Polish culture exist (Janion, 2006a; 2006b; Walczewska, 2000; Graff, 2003a; 2003b; 2008).³³ Despite the fact that women's roles as mothers have been elevated and the emphasis on tradition and family values offer Polish mothers supposedly significant authority and respect, this is conditioned by various demands of the patriarchal system. The common belief that mothers preside over the spiritual security of Poland fuels the current climate of nationalism. Calls for domestication of women under the banner of the return of 'true' womanhood are voiced specifically by the Catholic Church, along with right wing political parties and other organisations claiming to be based on Catholic morality. The most enduring and culturally specific pressure on the Polish mothers is exercised through the promulgation and cultural validation of the ideal of the coping mother, and particularly the myth of Matka Polka.

As I have indicated in the Introduction, employing the idea of Matka Polka for the purposes of this thesis differs from the approach taken by other authors in that I argue it represents

both obduracy and fluidity with regard to the values and ideals embedded in the concept of the coping mother. It represents fusions of various pressures of specific historical periods which are shaped and appropriated by the climate and requirements of each era: she is the mother-patriot, the working mother, the self-sacrificial, devoted and coping heroine. The representation is obdurate in exerting elements of control over women's lives but also fluid in the way it has been utilised in various ways by the ruling powers: the Church and the state, but also women themselves. I argue in this thesis that the concept of the coping mother is perpetuated by and through women and men. It happens through the invocations of cultural myths such as the myth of Matka Polka, which embodies often contrary notions of motherhood and has been conceptualised in different ways by different authors. For example, Anita Seibert (2001) identifies Matka Polka exclusively with home-centred motherhood and posits the concept of the Communist Woman to illustrate the idea of the double-burden carried by women responsible for production and reproduction. Thus Seibert conceptually relegates Matka Polka exclusively to the private sphere. This approach, however, stands in stark contrast to the accounts of Matka Polka provided by my participants, who understood it as an illustration of the working and coping mother who is capable of meeting the demands of both the public and private sphere. Conversely, the womanhood imagery of the communist era encapsulated by Seibert's Communist Woman, is understood here as the communist version of Matka Polka as the coping mother rather than a separate representation.

Culturally and historically, Polish mothers have been positioned in submissive roles in relation to men but also to the nation-state. Women's selflessness has been promoted as their main virtue. The inferiority of women, although surrounded by respect, has been defined basically by their 'sacred destiny': as a faithful companion for her husband, caring educator for their children, and a prudent hostess of the house (Rzepniewska, 1995:40). These demands are expressions of the various influences acting upon the lives of mothers. They represent how society, its governing bodies, and the Catholic Church, exert power by shaping and promulgating the appropriate and acceptable ways in which to mother – often with a direct control over women's bodies (e.g. in relation to abortion). During the communist era the system actively promoted and supported the model of a working mother through the provision of day care. Now, in the era of democracy after communism, the more glamorised version of womanhood is portrayed through ideals of professional success and simultaneously through the demands to be a perfect mother, wife and a home maker: the 'New Polish Woman', who on the labour market is the winner of the transformation, in the

public sphere a sexual object, and in the private realm is often seen as Matka Polka (Seibert, 2001).

Representations of motherhood shape the way women might feel compelled to experience their mothering and thus influence the ways in which mothers exercise their agency in particular circumstances. The social construct, the institution of motherhood (Rich, 1977), creates the various demands towards maternal work, which might not be perceived by a mother as totally controlling. As Ruddick argues, the demand for acceptability is not simply imposed on a mother but the mother herself often becomes an agent in formulating the ideals and ways in which they should be adhered in order to meet the expectations of the larger social group (1989:21). A mother will often have more control over the details of her work at home than any other workers and she will frequently be able to decide in her own way how to bring up her children into adults whom she and others 'can delightedly appreciate' (Ruddick, 1989:21). Yet, as discussed earlier, mother's agency is conditioned by a number of factors: the culturally sanctioned metanarratives on motherhood, the values and beliefs embedded in practices around mothering, the sentimental yet powerful description of 'good mothering', the social impotence and the common superiority of a father. In the face of these constraints, in many cases a mother can experience herself as powerless. The many external constraints on a mother's capacity to narrate and act are further reinforced by a woman's position in the social structure. Low income levels, inferior education, impoverished locality, unemployment and a lack or inadequate access to health and childcare determine the way women are able to mother. For example, a single-mother will almost certainly be exposed to a greater risk of poverty with implications for her mothering and family life. In comparison to single-mothers in the West, the Polish single-mother experienced an additional risk due to the sudden removal of the welfare state. The growing social polarisation in Polish society as a whole, but also between women, is a consequence of the transformational processes. For many women, the 1989 transformation redefined the role of motherhood in their lives. The state-supported and socially accepted role of the working mother during the previous era often led to a more difficult model to achieve in democracy after communism. The discrepancies between the experiences of the various groups of women who have in different and often unequal ways experienced the post-communist transformation illuminate the varied and uneven pathways available to women as mothers. The discussion in this thesis demonstrates this further.

The contextual aspects of the transformation illuminate a greater choice and opportunity available to social actors. These greater opportunities apparently offer a chance for individuals to be more self-reflexive as a result of the transformation and are not specific to

Poland (Adkins, 2002:14; Lash, 1994:111). According to the 'detraditionalisation thesis', in the contemporary global world individuals are liberated from the rigid social scripts and rules of being and behaving (Heelas *et al.*, 1996; Beck, 1992, 2000; Giddens, 1991, 1992, 1994; Bauman, 2000). Similarly, individuals living in post-communist environments can be seen as being 'freed' from the authoritarian structure of communism and the particular visions of socialist citizens. As argued by Anthony Giddens (1992), such increased freedom from structural constraints means that social actors are becoming self-reflexive in the process of 'making' selves. But this theoretical view on the greater freedom available to individuals in the contemporary context has also been highly criticised especially in relation to an absence of the contextualisation of power relations between and within genders (Miller, 2005; McNay, 1993). Miller highlighted for example the lack of acknowledgment of both 'continuities and changes that shape women's lives' (2005:140). Analysing the changing role of motherhood in the lives of women who have lived through the transformation requires that close attention is paid to 'the material and structural context which pattern women's lives [because] self-reflexivity is not universally experienced' (Miller, 2005:140-141). Without greater consideration for gender, Giddens still discusses another important facet of human agency—the bodily aspect; in his words: 'corporeality imposes strict limitations upon the capabilities of movement and perception of the human agent' (1984:111). As Simone de Beauvoir (1972) put it, the body of woman is one of the 'essential elements' in her situation in the world.³⁴ There are certain 'brute facts' found in biological differences that will always separate women's experiences from those of men: menstruation, conception, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation and childcare significantly influence women's autonomy and ability to 'take freedom to control their own life' (Almond, 1988:52). When looking at the masculine possibilities for autonomy, they are largely different to women's options, which often evolve within a framework of family structures. McNay has also pointed to the 'unconscious and entrenched' aspects of identity, which have not been taken into account in theories of reflexivity (1993:30, cited in Miller, 2005:144). Crucially then, the embodied gender norms vitally constitute a fundamental part of women's social experience, both reinforcing and reproducing ideas and practices linked with the biological aspects of women's lives. This enormously complex aspect of human agency has long been neglected by sociologists (Sztompka, 1993:197).

The underlining argument of the detraditionalisation thesis is that since the mid-to-late twentieth century we can observe a disappearing importance of tradition (Heelas *et al.*, 1996). This, I believe is one further dimension of reflexivity to consider carefully as some traditions, or at least some aspects of them, survive 'beside, behind, between or beneath the

practices and structures' of gendered lives (Luke, 1996:112). This is especially the case when looking at the culturally conditioned demands around maternal work: the way women mother is largely shaped by the values, beliefs and customs that are historically sedimented and deeply-rooted (McNay, 2000). Changes in expectations around mothering are slower to transform as they have been conditioned by historical, social, and cultural contexts that are often ingrained in biological determinism³⁵.

It is clear then that the demands of maternal work are structured by various factors and locally specific discourses which are vital elements that act as both limiting and enabling to women's agency. As I have discussed, women's specific responses are linked with both personal and structural forces (Morrissey, 2003:7). The supposedly higher social status of fulfilling the role of mother in Poland illustrates her 'powerless power' and stands in stark contrast to the everyday experiences of maternal 'power' which, as Ruddick observes,

is not a stable quantity but highly variable depending on technological development, individual as well as collective economic resources, changing social and military policies, employment opportunities, housing practices, family arrangements, the mood, success, well-being, and age of her children, and, of course, her own health, energy, and non-material ambitions (1989:36).

The demands of the maternal work that shape women's experiences in Poland are both embedded in historical legacy and shifting. The most recent shifts linked with the transformation from communism to democracy and accompanied by the changes in power relations have redefined the experience of being a mother in a significant way. The narratives of women who seemingly found themselves more prosperous in the new post-communist reality (Chapters 5 and 7) offer an understanding of the systemic and structural changes as seen by the apparently powerful mothers. With their higher levels of education, relatively stable employment, and apparently more egalitarian gender relations at home, these women living in urban agglomerations appear able to negotiate the demands of the maternal work as imposed by the culture, tradition, and the system to a much greater extent than the mothers whose structural and material life contexts have been less favourable.

Conclusions

In examining the notions of post-communist transformation, narrative and motherhood, this chapter has set the theoretical frames for my further discussion in this thesis. The post-communist transformation has greatly reshaped the socio-economic context of women's

lives as mothers in Poland. Whilst some groups have been seen by the analysts of the post-communist condition as more able to advance in this new situation, speaking in broad terms, women, especially in their roles as mothers, have 'lost' following the transformation. In offering a seemingly greater freedom, greater choice and greater opportunity, the free market reality has contributed to the stratification of the whole society and impacted on the way mothering experiences have become more diversified than in the previous era. The metanarrative of the market, fuelled by the hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism, offers Poland a symbolic return to Europe and restores the country back within the global framework of the Western alliances. But the demands of the market towards the self-reliant, autonomous, and liberated worker conflict considerably with women's roles as mothers (Hays, 1996:x). Additionally, the locally prescribed cultural definitions of appropriate womanhood and the coping mother contribute to the creation of contemporary post-communist representations of motherhood that are novel but also enduring in their essence, embedded in the model of the 'New Polish Woman'.

The dominant narratives that shape the post-communist context of women's lives in Poland, the market metanarrative and the concept of the coping mother, in turn have shaped the personal narratives produced by the participants in this study. In order to understand these women's experiences as mothers living through the political, socio-economic and cultural transformation, consideration must be given to the specific contexts that shape their individual lives. In this research the participants' socio-economic position enabled them to operationalise their agency more actively (as opposed to people from other social positions) and to produce the types of narratives that offer insights into their complex, often contradictory and very personal stories of mothers living in post-communist Poland.

In the next two chapters, I provide an analysis that offers better understandings of how these dominant narratives of the market and Polish motherhood came to shape the individual narratives offered by the participants. I trace the roots of the specific constructions of motherhood examining their links with the historical, political, and cultural situation of Poland. These representations continue to influence the production of contemporary discourses on the seemingly proper womanhood and circumscribe women's roles as mothers. I then discuss the various consequences and the social cost of the transformation on Polish society to illuminate women's situation in their roles as mothers.

Chapter 2

Representations of Motherhood in Poland

Introduction

In this chapter I examine representations and constructions of motherhood in Poland from a socio-historical perspective. The chapter offers insights into the contexts of women's lives as mothers from the late eighteenth century through the communist era to the democracy after communism. In this overview I demonstrate the relationship between the various important influences (the state, the Catholic Church, the market metanarrative and actual economic relations) exploring the contextual factors that have influenced shifting constructions of motherhood in Poland. Motherhood and its evolving definitions are subject to manipulation by societal, political and cultural structures which in different ways powerfully shape expectations and experiences.

The period covered in this chapter saw various incarnations of the concept of the coping mother amongst which a special position seems to be held by the personifications of motherhood captured in the myth of Matka Polka. The idea of the coping mother reappears in different historical contexts reflecting the spirit of the time in images that range from the self-sacrificing mother who was the symbolic guardian of the language, tradition and national identity during the time of partition, through the communist superwoman who carried a double-burden of producer-reproducer in times of hardship, to the supposedly liberated worker-mother in the current time of democracy epitomised in the image of the 'New Polish Woman'. I trace these representations to argue the obduracy of certain expectations and demands embedded in all of them and which continue to permeate the public discourse on 'appropriate' womanhood in Poland.

The partition period, as well as the communist era, saw redefinitions of the private and the public spheres. This chapter explores the consequences of these redefinitions for the constructions of gendered roles in contemporary Poland. For instance, the inability to fully enact the normative understandings of men's and women's roles during the communist times contributed to the masculinisation of the public sphere after the collapse of the communist system (Watson, 1993b; Klingman, 1996; Stukuls, 1999; Gapova, 2002). I demonstrate how

this trend, representative of many post-Soviet countries, unfolded in Poland. The calls for women's return to 'their purely womanly mission' (Gapova, 2002:652) have been further reinforced by the Church and its supporters, who plead for reestablishment of the supposedly proper gender roles in Polish society. I thus also examine the prominent role of the Catholic Church and its consequences for women's lives as mothers. The veneration of the Virgin Mary, especially in her role as a mother, central in Catholicism, translates into essential constructions of womanhood, promulgated in the public and the political arenas. This chapter offers an analysis of the implementation of the restrictive abortion bill which will illuminate the powerful position of the Church in the new democratic Poland—an authority that exposes the dominance of specific religious views on womanhood and therefore on the lives, bodies and selves of women in Poland.

I conclude this chapter with the argument that the new democratic reality continues to subjugate women in Poland. This oppression is contrasted with the latest representation and glamorised image of the 'New Polish Woman'. Whilst the post-1989 economic context might have offered new opportunities, greater freedom and more choice, the calls for the return of 'true' femininities continue to define womanhood in the democracy after communism.

Constructions of Motherhood from a Historical Perspective

As discussed in Chapter 1, the demands placed upon the work of the mother by her social milieu shape the role of that mother. These demands are historically and culturally conditioned. Culturally, mothers' work is greatly influenced by the expectations of the social groups of which a mother may be a member (Ruddick, 1989:21). The preservation of the national or local identity, tradition and language are thus often inscribed in maternal work during the times of political crisis and social upheaval.³⁶ In such times, the iconography of a woman's body, and especially that of a mother, is commonly employed and manipulated by various authorities in the construction of nationalisms (see e.g. Hartwich, 2003; Sunindyo, 1998).³⁷ The position and the role of the mother in Poland has been shaped importantly by the socio-political context of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century—in the partitioned country, years of struggle for independence and strong beliefs in Catholic values created a powerful context in which the home realm became the 'sacred' shelter guarded predominantly by mothers (Titkow, 2001). This specific framework contributed to the construction of discourses and allegories that shaped the lives of the majority of Polish

mothers; the self sacrificing mother-patriot mirrored and symbolised the torment of the country. The primal position of the home realm has consequently also shifted the divide between the 'public' and the 'private' spheres asserting the apparent importance of the mother figure as its guardian (Szwajcowska, 2006; Walczewska, 2000; Żarnowska, 1996).

The nationalistic expectations of womanhood linked with maternal work had important implications for the way the private and the public spheres interacted and were conceptualised in the following eras. Since the time of partitions, the 'private sphere' has been associated with women with regard to their guardianship of the home realm and the raising of children. In the same period the 'public sphere' became identified as a male preserve as evidenced in its imagery and representation of national, economic and political life: emphatically the world outside the home realm (Okin, 1979; 1989).³⁸ Historic partitions followed by war and subsequent communist state oppression imposed political and cultural subjugation on the majority of men and women and thus the mass population was confronted with an alien state apparatus over a significant period of time, which necessarily shaped their political attitudes and social practices (Żarnowska, 1996:472). This specific socio-historical situation resulted in the state apparatus being perceived as 'evil' and, more poignantly, in the national consciousness the state became conceptualised as 'them' and the heroic non gendered non classed 'we' cast in opposition; a state of mind that continued up until the time the communist system collapsed (Skapska, 1997:147). The fundamental sociological change which this caused was the interpenetrating and blurring of functions and previously associated gender distinctions between the public and private spheres. The private sphere became the main locus of economic activity, information exchange and a place where tradition and religion were preserved (Kenney, 1999:402; Watson, 1993a:480; Havelková, 1993:68). Both men and women were often in circumstances where they were 'united' against the dictatorial state rather than in opposition to each other. The distinction is not trivial. As Barbara Einhorn notes, due to the discrepancies between official state rhetoric and the reality of unofficial practice in East Central Europe, ideas around the 'family's function as pivotal in oppressing women and in mediating their relations with the wider society' misinformed and were often misinterpreted by Western feminists (1993:59). Some authors have argued that specific 'gender solidarity' or 'gender unity'—the split of 'us' (the people) against 'them' (the system) obscured gender differences (Lipien, 2008; Einhorn, 1993:60; Watson, 1992:135). As noted by Einhorn, many women living under the communist regime were seen by the society (but also perceived themselves) as the 'governesses' of the private realm and thus were often prepared to 'maintain privacy and non-intrusion by the state in the

name of individual autonomy, even if that autonomy was exclusively male' (Einhorn, 1993:62).

In summary, in Poland, the centrality of the family can often elevate (or subjugate) the role of the mother. The socio-cultural conditions of the partitioning era that initially contributed to the creation of motherhood role models were equally as often appropriated by the state and commentators to meet different and changing political and ideological needs regardless of the reality of the time.

In European history, allegories of the female character have often been invoked to epitomise different nations and their interests: France's *Marianne* became a symbol of freedom during the Revolution; Germany's *Germania* was a political leader's reflection of imperial aspirations; *Britannia*'s image represented belonging to Great Britain, and *Italia*'s role was to protect the Italian nation (Warner, 1985).³⁹ The existence of female allegories was determined by their usefulness for the national rhetoric—those allegories functioned as metaphors of female loyalty towards the patriarchal order represented by their fathers and husbands or social and political institutions governed by men (Janion, 2006; Ostrowska, 2004; Parker *et al.*, 1992; Kaplan, 1992). As a result, those female allegories were inevitably powerfully shaped by a patriarchal order; their roles also enacted within strictly defined time frames—during periods of political turmoil (Krasiak-Brownstein, 2006:416-417). In the eighteenth century, the female figure of *Polonia* emerged in partitioned Poland; she was supposed to be 'the flesh and the spirit of a Polish nation and an expression of its fate' (Hartwich, 2003:3).⁴⁰ In works of art she is often portrayed as defeated and in agony but at the same time majestic and proud (Janion, 2006b:269). She is usually in the background or set on one side separate from the main drama of the paintings depicting rebellions and military action. Consequently, this figure is invariably portrayed as a passive element in the national struggle which is very different from the original idea of the passionate, brave figure of the French *Marianne*, the inspiration for the Polish heroine.⁴¹ Although grand and noble, the allegory of *Polonia* could not and did not really embody 'the flesh and the spirit of a Polish nation' (Hartwich, 2003:3). The continuous lack of statehood and a struggle to regain it resulted in the translocation of the national embodiment from the allegory of *Polonia* to the figure of Matka Polka. She was to represent an ordinary woman with whom a Polish mother could identify and whose vital characteristics of self-sacrifice and devotion would serve as attributes that would powerfully shape the construction of femininities in Poland from that point forward.

The emergence of Matka Polka has been attributed to the work of Adam Mickiewicz, the iconic Polish writer of the Romantic era who used the expression in the context of national independence in his poem *To a Polish Mother* (1830) where he eulogised female bravery (Janion, 2006a:99). As Sz wajcowa explains, the poem 'draws a poignant picture of the destiny of a Polish mother ... [who] has to prepare herself, as well as her son, for the awaiting martyrdom' (2006:24). Since then, the myth of Matka Polka has been present in the national rhetoric and reproduced over time, serving as a powerful reference point for generations of women (Janion, 2006a:99). By the early 1900s *Polonia* disappeared from the Polish national iconography but the enduring characteristics of Matka Polka remained. Whilst *Polonia* served her role as a part of the nineteenth century cultural identity of the nation, the role of Matka Polka has contributed to the creation of a 'super woman' identity in the second half of the twentieth century. This woman is one who heroically and enthusiastically carries the 'double-burden' of paid work and family chores, and is expected to happily sacrifice personal ambitions for her husband's career and her children's needs (Nowakowska and Piwnik, 2000:11; Oleksy, 2000). Interestingly, the mythological, passive allegory has given rise to constructions of the new active woman (yet 'active' in a way that is to her disadvantage because she is doubly-burdened) who cares for home and the nation, and who has become the heroine of everyday life.

The divide within Polish society—between the population and the ruling powers—during the communist era further strengthened the importance of the home realm and the mass entry of women into the workforce redefined the constructions of motherhood during that time. From now on Matka Polka was associated with contributing both to reproductive and productive labour. Importantly, since the communist propaganda employed the myth in promoting the epic image of the working woman, the general public will often link the myth with the communist era. As the dominant ideology of women's emancipation often meant a double-burden for women, the demands shaping maternal work during that time were coming from two main directions: the communist system and societal expectations. The dictatorial character of the government had fundamental implications for the way the public-private dichotomy was structured, and this essentially defined the societal expectations towards women as mothers. The divide between 'us', the society, and 'them', the ruling powers, resembled the context of the partition period when the functions of the public realm moved to the private sphere. Once again, the home realm became the locus where tradition and religion were preserved and where the mother was to be the protector of the national values (Kenney, 1999). Since the home sphere was regarded as a special place separated from the authoritarian power, the fact that by convention the 'home' is seen as a female

domain, meant that women were led to consider themselves as the governesses of this space. Yet, whilst the home realm became the place where women held power, it also meant that the demands traditionally associated with the reproductive work—housework, child-bearing, and child rearing—were automatically and exclusively ascribed as being women's responsibilities. Simultaneously, the regime promoted women's paid employment, which was obligatory for both women and men. Thus, although in the absence of any alternative, the communist government turned to reinforcing traditional conceptions of gender roles, the patriarchal model was only an official version of the reality. In fact, two salaries were often necessary for the family's survival, which meant that the majority of men were not able to fulfil the breadwinner's role and thus not many women were confined exclusively to the domestic sphere (as the Western patriarchal model presumes). Being a reproducer and producer in the times of scarcity of food and consumable goods became a common life script amongst many Eastern European women and fostered the general perception of them as 'superwomen' (Corrin, 1992).

The multiplicity of roles that many women had to assume during the communist era significantly shaped their selves and self-perceptions. The findings from a study by two Polish sociologists Mira Marody and Anna Giza-Poleszczuk (2000) reveal that because men were unable to fulfil their figurative and actual role as the breadwinners, many women assumed the position of head of the family, which enabled them to consider themselves as 'strong women'. In their eyes, according to the study, their husbands lost the base of the authority and became 'weak men'. This led some women to position their husbands as 'immature, helpless, and dependent creatures' (Podgórska, 2003:3). Furthermore, this has also influenced the general perception of men during the communist times as background figures in family life. Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk argue further that during the communist era many women adopted and actively shaped an identity of *Matka Polka* as a 'brave victim' whose self-sacrifice was an indispensable element in the smooth functioning of the family and society (2000:163). The mother figure was the strong woman but also 'the gentle and wise mother who rears not only her children but her husband too' (ibid:162). Men were represented as 'big children' whose social status and success in the professional sphere was accomplished only thanks to their wives' coaching, support, and sacrifices. Women were positioned in powerful ways in this construction of family life. Psychologist Deborah Carr (2004) notes that such comparative positioning can offer the comparer specific psychological outcomes. In feeling responsible for the success of her husband the wife can experience the outcomes of that success as if they were her own (Carr, 2004:134). Thus, many women willingly assumed this subjugated identity because the sense of victimhood

provided them with a form of self-respect. In positioning themselves within the essentialising notion of womanhood, these women did not perceive their double-burden as a matter of gender but rather as a state-imposed problem (Watson, 1997:155; Grapard, 1997; Dölling, 1991). Adopting such an identity gave women the 'moral upper hand' in their domestic lives as well as a justification for pride in their situation. This offered them feelings of being the 'real' authority in the private sphere, the 'real' head of the family because they felt they were sacrificing themselves for the greater good—family, children, husband's career or the nation. As Anna Titkow noted, the idea that everything was on the mother's shoulders provided many Polish women with 'tremendous psychological gratification ... [which] was more important than the satisfaction that comes from occupational or social status' (1998:26).

The Catholic Church had been yet another force shaping the trajectory of women's lives under communism in Poland. Having possessed an important role as the great supporter of the free society and backed at that time by the Polish Pope John Paul II, the Church's calls for sacrificial motherhood in the name of the common good only added to the various demands associated with maternal work. In the democracy after communism the Church's role in influencing women's lives went much further. The newly gained institutional power would translate into a direct control not only over the public discourse on the supposedly real women's vocation, but also their personal right to determination over their bodies.

Throughout the communist period the state, cultural traditions, and the Church interacted with each other creating various demands on women as mothers. In moving between and negotiating different sets of power relations, the communist era mother was to do her work on many fronts. The 'crucial line of conflict', which Václav Havel said ran through the middle of each individual during the communist regime, was running through mothers too, who negotiated often conflicting requirements and tried to meet the demands put upon them by the various powers (Ash, 1999:113). This epic Polish mother had to face yet another challenge when forty years of communist rule came to an end in 1989. Those women who had lived under communism entered the context of post-communist Poland with their identities forged during the previous system. Now, the new representations available to them redefined the demands of maternal work, exposing some parts that are stable and persistent and others that are fluid and changeable. The reality of democracy after communism posed significant challenges to the ways in which some women were going to, and were able to, mother.

The State and Motherhood During the Communist Era

Socialist theories about the family illustrate 'the contradictions inherent in both theory and practice' within the communist system (Einhorn, 1993:18; Grapard, 1997). This becomes visible in the ways the Soviet era created the doubly-burdened woman, the mother-worker, who under the ideological banners of 'equality' and 'liberation' became instrumentalised as the producer and reproducer in the patriarchal communist state (Ferree, 1995). In the following section I discuss how the communist system promoted the idea of the working mother in order to stimulate economic development in the post-war years and meet the high demand for labour. I also demonstrate how mothers utilised their positions, as promoted by the state, to take advantage of their social interests as well as protect the interests of their children.

The genesis of early Soviet legislation demonstrates that the state's initial decrees closely followed a Marxist vision. Granting women proper access to the workforce was seen as an essential way of offering them the necessary financial independence which was ultimately supposed to 'emancipate' women (Holmes, 1997:251; Bliss and Polutnik, 2003:213). Furthermore, as advocated by Engels, in such an environment 'the nuclear family would cease to be the economic unit of society, domestic work would change into a public industry and the care and education of the young would be a public matter' (Schwartz, 1979:68). Following those claims in the early 1920s the Soviet state introduced 'the labour codes ... of equal right to work and equal pay, access to educational institutions, protection from hazardous work, as well as the right to divorce, to obtain an abortion, and to select a domicile and name' (ibid).⁴² But because the liberation of women was seen solely through the act of women's participation in the workforce (as necessary and sufficient condition) it became consequently a 'gender-blind theoretical canon' (Einhorn, 1993:35). The communist idea that women would be emancipated through entry into the workforce (and thus somehow released from their domestic work) without men assuming any part of domestic responsibilities turned the emancipatory promise into an 'ill-founded' belief (Corrin, 1992:14). The ideology, which so fervently supported women's participation in the labour force, in reality retained the traditional values which 'assign primacy to the role of women as child-bearers and homemakers' (Schwartz, 1979:69). Calls to bring men into the home realm to help women by introducing relevant legislation and providing adequate structures were completely disregarded (Tsagarousianou, 1995). The logic behind this approach, according to Schwarz (1979), was closely linked with the models of masculinities and femininities promoted by the early communist propaganda. For example, because men were portrayed

through ideas of traditional masculine characteristics of physical strength, physical labour, and toughness (e.g. as builders or factory workers), engaging them in the childrearing responsibilities would significantly conflict with that model. It was easier and more convenient to pressure women into taking up additional responsibilities in the name of emancipation instead of attempting to change the 'normal'/accepted gender order. Thus, even though women's productive role was seen as economically necessary, it was always going to be in conflict with their reproductive roles (Plakwicz, 1992:80).

Women's occupational engagement was not only a result of ideological propaganda about gender equality or the changes in the social structures linked to the sphere of family politics; it was in fact determined by the events of both World Wars which brought high demands for labour.⁴³ In Poland, the great demand for women's labour was reflected for instance in growing employment rates, which in the years between 1950 and 1989 rose by 252 percent (Kurzynowski, 2000:192). So, whilst the Stalinist pursuit towards industrialisation meant that huge numbers of highly trained workers would be required, thereby sanctioning the 'green light' for women's labour participation, in reality even before the Second World War the regime's primary goal was economic development and not women's equality. The subsequent reasons behind the alleged enduring commitment towards women's equality and professional advancement were thus only a façade. The social reality of women's employment was shaped greatly by the lack of access to training and skilled jobs, which in turn distinctively aligned women's roles with particular types of worker. The lack of adequate social services, lack of promotion opportunities and strong workforce segregation were also fundamental features of women's employment experience (Pollert, 2003:333-334).

The communist proclamations about women's supposed emancipation went only as far as enabling their access to the workforce and providing them with childcare facilities. Although this provided many women with a greater autonomy and limited financial independence, in reality it meant that without addressing gender experiences in the household, the communist era burdened women with the 'second-shift' (Hochschild, 1989). The Soviet women in their double-burden (when compared to the double-burden experienced by Western women) were additionally strained by household chores not alleviated by modern conveniences (e.g. microwaves or freezers), but also by the dysfunctional economic sphere where consumer goods were rationed and scarce (Duffy, 2000:235; see also Hochschild, 1989; Hays, 1996; Delphy and Leonard, 1992; Carling *et al.*, 2002; Warner, 2006).

In Poland, following the Second World War the concerns with motherhood were one of the main points on the governmental agenda. Due to fluctuating demographic trends the state

was employing contradictory policies towards reproduction (Tsagarousianou, 1995). The initial post-war baby boom, which lasted until the late 1950s, evoked alarming reactions from the government who realised that the social services would not meet the then need for childcare. As a result the government focused on 'promoting birth control, advertising contraceptives and establishing the Conscious Motherhood Association; a network of family planning centres' (all in theory at least forward looking and liberal actions) (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000:156).⁴⁴ In the 1970s, as a result of the successful implementation of the reproductive policies of the 1950s, the birth rate was in a worrying state of decline. In response, the government developed 'a pro-natalist policy that promoted a "2 plus 3" family model and introduced paid maternity leave [in 1968—12 weeks, and from 1972—16 weeks (Kurzynowski, 2000)] and special credits for young families' (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000:156). Women's biological abilities to reproduce were used to pressure women into having more children. Political leaders even honoured those who had ten or more offspring with the cross of 'services to the country' (Podgórska, 2003:3; Chimiak, 2003). The discourse of 'people as power' became propagated with the purpose of enlarging the population and it was epitomised as a vital element of the national interest (Yuval-Davis, 1996:22). While officially propagating the happy face of a brave reproducer, the communist party line praised women as brave citizens who should also work hard to rebuild the country.

The facilitation of a women's double-burden was also reinforced at the legislative level by the 1952 Constitution, Article 14.1, which stated that 'work is the right, the duty and a matter of honour for every citizen', and Article 66.2 guaranteeing 'care for mother and the child, protection of pregnant woman, paid maternity leave before and after the birth of a child, development of a network of obstetric clinics, nurseries, kindergartens, service establishments and canteens'.⁴⁵ Additionally, in the 1980s the government introduced paid childcare leave for the mother (income-dependent) initially for one year and later on extended it to three years. Polish women 'became trapped in a double slavery... [with] the ideological bigotry strongly affecting [their] families, professional groups, and the overall gender framework of society' contributing to a split identity between the differently demanding spheres (Panova *et al.*, 1993:17). The expectation to live up to both ideals—the dutiful worker and the patriotic mother—in practice meant that the constitutional equality (included in Article 66.1) was 'merely symbolic right that lacked actual import' (Fuszara, 2000:1071). Women were expected to be reproducers but without giving up their roles as producers and vice versa.

Chris Corrin in her book *Superwomen and the Double Burden* focusing on women's experiences of change in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, argues

that 'women's "double-burden" was [in fact] very necessary to the smooth functioning of [the communist society]' (1992:21-22). By employing the measures of doubly-burdening women the Party actually saved on extra expenses that hiring men (the extra housing) and/or providing adequate social services (such as day care centres, cafeterias and other communal services necessary to free women from their traditional household responsibilities) would require, and yet was still able to fulfil the productive demands of the economy (Schrand, 1999). Polish scholar Elzbieta Oleksy deciphers the ethos embedded in the communist ideology of the doubly-burdened superwoman as defining a mother as someone who can achieve anything if only she has sufficient will and enthusiasm (2000:38). Greta Bucher in her article on the situation of Soviet women in the post-war years makes this analogous observation; 'the picture Soviet propaganda painted ... was an independent and resourceful person, dedicated to improving the future through production, reproduction, and parenting . . . [and] successfully fulfilling all the demands placed upon her' (2000:152). As highlighted by Myra Max Ferree; the 'conventional' woman contributed both reproductive and productive labour to a collectively male-defined state hence she 'was not at the disposal of an individual man but [she was ultimately] instrumentalised by the state as patriarch' (1995:15). The rhetoric of the state supporting 'its' mothers was used politically to promote the alleged ease with which women carried the duality of roles both internally, in the East, and as communist propaganda to the West (Ferree, 1995:15).

The example of the instrumental use of a mother's capacities by the communist patriarchal state demonstrates how the demands towards maternal work shaped the lives of many women under the authoritarian rule (Gal and Kligman, 2000b). Yet, while the communist regime's concepts of the socialist citizen defined the state requirement for many women and men, individual practices often did not reflect the rules and prevailing norms in a direct way (McNay, 2000:4). Good examples were the individual and group actions against the political expectations of the state in forms of strikes, dissident actions and underground activities. Despite the totalising character of the communist states such activities were present in all former communist societies. As constraint is often seen as generative of agency, individuals can be simultaneously 'the changed' and also 'the changers' (Ricoeur, 1991; The Personal Narratives Group, 1989:6). With a well documented and a long-standing tradition of underground activism in Poland the dominant discourse promotes and proliferates the image of the revolution in strictly male-defined terms (Penn, 2005; Kenney, 1999). Still, during the communist era, some of the working mothers were able to utilise their social positions as mothers in order to advance their interests. Such intentional use of feminine attributes has been described as 'maternal' strategy (Bourque, 2001). This example importantly illustrates

how in its instrumental approach towards women the state promoted them as the 'emancipated' working mothers'. The communist authorities underestimated the power of the seemingly powerless mothers. This example illuminates how individual and group agency can shape and challenge authoritarian arrangements. It shows how this group of mothers whose lives were strictly regulated by the communist system and dominated by the communist discourses of the obedient and submissive citizens were not only 'the changed' but also became 'the changers' in this confrontation.

Strategies which draw upon maternal aspects of women's lives have been used before to access previously restricted areas (or state services) by members of specific interest groups (see e.g. Fisher, 2000). This has been especially the case in situations when the state has traditionally emphasised the importance of motherhood and women's role as caretaker. Although criticised for 'celebrating self-sacrifice as an essential feminine attribute and therefore reinforcing traditional gender roles', Polish working mothers realised its strategic value (Oosterhoff *et al.*, 2008:168). For example, such 'maternalistic' strategies were used to secure their demands to achieve price cuts during one of the strikes in the early 1970s.⁴⁶ Although reinforcing conventional gender roles, the women were able to undermine their traditional image as obedient and 'silent' workers to 'claim' a right to feed their children. Molyneux noted that in the situations when women actually convened to utilise their biological abilities to their advantage, rather than challenging it, and employed the language of difference in a strategic way, the position sometimes served to destabilise the traditional gender differences (2000:44-45). Those striking women used their positions as mothers in putting forward their arguments to their benefit; ultimately, they won their claim by bringing into their talks with the Party their arguments about their inabilities to feed their children and by positioning themselves as powerless mothers.

This historical example of using the language of motherhood and the powerful meanings behind it deserves particular attention as these women demonstrated that they were able to skilfully manipulate the authorities' perceptions of them. Capitalising on the idea of mothering as centrally positioned in the national rhetoric, the women fused their workers' identities into their identities as mothers in order to be able to put their demands into that central national rhetoric. By repositioning their workers' demands into the area of mothers' needs they managed to turn it into a national matter. They were not only workers, but mother-workers, praised through the image of the coping mother by their own government. The women introduced themselves as working mothers who were unable to feed their children and therefore unable to meet the demands of the national mission—to bring up the next generation of citizens. They forced the government to deliver on their paternal promise

and signalled to the authorities that they should not underestimate the mother-consumer (Kenney, 1999:414). Since it was women who were generally burdened with the tedious, energy consuming, and never ending responsibility of 'organising' the food for the family, it was them who were hit hardest by the shortages of food. By politicising their demands they ultimately 'helped to reshape the conflict as a struggle for the very survival of society' (Kenney, 1999:419).⁴⁷ As Kenney noted, it was 'for the first time ever [that] a communist government publicly retreated under social pressure' (1999:410). Although this event represents an important example of Polish resistance during communism (additionally having an impact on the economic policy of the 1970s), the mothers' success during that incident has received almost no scholarly attention (ibid). The marginalisation of this successful accomplishment ignores women's capacities as active agents, beyond their roles of food organiser for their families, but it also overlooks how through their limited options to act they were still able to publicly confront the authorities. This exclusion of women's participation in opposition activities also highlights the sexist perception and positioning of women in Polish culture.

The 'superwoman' that the communist era produced—'a good public worker/ mother/ wife/ domestic worker' (Corrin, 1992:11)—stood in ironic contrast to the post-feminist Western discourse of a 'superwoman' that propagated a utopian vision of a woman who could do and achieve anything she wanted (Oleksy, 2000:38). The Soviet women could 'achieve' anything by becoming the self-sacrificing mothers who took everything on their shoulders to 'please' the state's and society's expectations. The self-sacrificing mother of the communist propaganda in Poland aligned then with the vision of femininity promoted by the Catholic Church as I will show in the next section.

The Church as the Key Player

The Catholic Church in Poland holds an important role which expands beyond its spiritual mission into the public arena. This includes (at times) having a significant voice in the way the social discourse of the 'good mother' is constructed and operates. Its significance, amassed during the communist era, became a tangible resource of institutional power that contributed to the dramatic changes on the legislative level which have had direct impact on women's bodies. Consequently, in post-communist Poland, women's choices surrounding motherhood are severely restricted by a stringent ban on abortion and a lack of subsidised contraceptives. Compared to the general availability and easy access to contraceptives and

the right to abort during the previous era, the collapse of the communist power represents a major setback for women in terms of their abilities to control their bodies and their reproductive lives.

Religion is a force that shapes views and attitudes and can define the most fundamental human aims and motivations. Weber (1905) stated that religious beliefs can be 'the most powerful elements responsible for shaping the character of a nation' (cited in Kosela, 2003:27). The Roman Catholic Church has been present in Polish cultural and social life for generations and certainly since the time the Polish nation marked its existence on the European landscape. The Church provides one of the very few threads of continuity for the Polish nation. According to Durkheim (1917), religion represents something eternal and destined to survive and through ritual activity and its mythological thought the collective sentiments and the collective ideas can be reaffirmed providing society with its unity and personality (cited in Calhoun *et al.*, 2007:190). Thus religion can be seen as a 'vehicle' enabling cultural traditions and values to be transmitted from generation to generation. These functions of religion—the binding and the transmitting—provided the Polish nation without its state with the collective consciousness that was one of the vital elements that helped to preserve it. It played an important part during the times when independence and freedom were lost by guarding national unity and eventually fusing its moral values into the fabric of social life.

During the nineteenth century's partition period the national consciousness focused primarily on religion (and language) which became 'the main sources of national history and existence' (Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 1999:94).⁴⁸ This was the first time links between the people and the clergy replaced the relationship with the state. Positioning itself in opposition to 'them' (the ruling powers), the majority of the society ('us') identified itself with the Church (that was on the 'us' side) rather than with the hostile state. It is an important point in history as it put in motion a mechanism of mutual support that, from then on, served both the Church and the nation—the Church offered spiritual and moral support often serving literally as a shelter, and the nation (a majority) submitted to its teachings and followed the often conservative philosophy.⁴⁹ The role of the Church in Poland in the twentieth century reached its zenith when the Polish pope was elected in 1978 during the time of the communist regime. He came to be seen by many as a catalyst for the changes that swept through Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. For the Polish nation his first visit as Pope to the homeland in 1979 was the launch of 'a revolution of conscience' (Weigel, 2005).⁵⁰ In such a context it is not difficult to imagine the influence of the Catholic authorities on the lives of women in Poland. The constructions of the 'true' models of

femininity perpetuated by the Catholic Church translate directly into the ways the Church had been promoting, indoctrinating and glorifying the roles of women in an essentialising way. The cult of the Virgin Mary in particular has been employed to highlight specific aspects of femininities linked exclusively with women's biological abilities to have children.

The Virgin Mary is the central female figure in Catholicism; not surprisingly the moral attributes of Mary are promoted as 'ideal' characteristics of Polish women and in particular mothers. The origins of the fascination with this figure are important to note as many of the moral values she represents have been assimilated into the myth of *Matka Polka*. In his article about the origins of the Virgin Mary, German linguist and anthropologist Harald Haarmann (1998) argues that there is evidence that the cult of Mary reflects a continuation of ancient goddess cults and that Mary's significance in Christianity developed out of popular religiosity.⁵¹ The notion of 'popular religiosity' has been distinguished from the 'clerical' tradition and is understood as linked with rituals cherished in everyday customs, originating in oral tradition and continuing through everyday public discourse (Eliade, 1985; Haarmann, 1998; Utrio, 1998). The role of communal values is an important factor then and because a majority of Poles have roots linked closely with traditional rural environments, their religiosity has been very much ritual and tradition orientated (Grzymała-Goszczyńska, 1999). This may explain the popularity of the Virgin Mary among people uprooted from the backgrounds where folklore and nature have played important roles in aspects of everyday life. It was only with time that the Virgin Mary was adopted by the Judaic-Christian monotheism as a 'Mother of God' which paved the way for her deification (Haarmann, 1998:24; Hamington, 1995). This was accompanied by a process of transformation—as Mary 'inherited the tradition of her powerful female predecessors, [she] was gradually stripped of some of her powers such as her domination over life and death, her wisdom, and her sexuality' (Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, 2007:16). The 'unsuitable parts' of domination, wisdom and sexuality were discarded to accommodate the figure that meets the demands of the Church. Contemporary constructions of the Virgin Mary incorporate only the accepted virtues such as purity, modesty and motherhood. Mary's officially sanctioned qualities have become those of 'submission, humility, suffering, and renunciation' (ibid:19). For centuries, these qualities have been endorsed as a model of womanhood for many women around the world and for many Catholics she still remains the most adored figure in the Christian tradition serving the role of 'mediatrix' between God and mankind (Utrio, 1989:38). The expressions of this mediating role of Mary are visible in shrines, churches, and other places of worship scattered around the globe where Mary as a mother is often the central figure.

Mary's role in the Polish vernacular went further than just being the centre of worship and was extended to serve the role of a mediator with God. Her characteristics of nobility, motherly devotion and nurture became fused into the mythology of Matka Polka. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba (2007) has highlighted the connection between Mary and the notion of one's own mother, family, motherland, and the state. Thus, she argues that Mary is called 'Matka Polka and Matka Polska indicating that she is the Polish Mother and Mother Poland' (2007:39). The link between Mary and Matka Polka inevitably puts certain restraints on the latter. Mary has come to represent the ideal cult figure and is portrayed always as the essence of particular female virtues. Similarly, Matka Polka is expected to be perfect and heroic. She is accorded high prestige in the family and society and, like Mary, she is metaphorically placed upon a pedestal. But such elevated positioning also limits her to certain expected and acceptable behaviours—while passions, dreams, excitement, or any other strong feelings are discarded as 'unsuitable'. Her human nature and physical desires are not given the slightest consideration. For example, Tina Beattie argues that Mary's unique and individual sense of personhood, in which the Catholic ideology has almost exclusively identified her with the maternity of Christ, is actually taken away from her, and her sexual body of a 'woman' is only a 'mask' (2006:107-111). In fact she becomes a 'body' of the Church and her being is only considered through her 'usefulness' in fulfilling the existence of a 'man' (ibid). Furthermore, because the valorisation of Mary's 'purity' sets up constraints on female sexuality her figure actually embodies contradictory ideals of motherhood and virginity in that it indicates condemnation for real women who are unable to meet such an impossible ideal (Szwajcowska, 2006:23; Caldwell, 1991:19). Such a model of femininity promotes a desexualisation of real women's images (Ostrowska, 2006:138).

Mary's motherhood is seen only through the great Christian mission of delivering the son of God; similarly, Matka Polka's maternal assignment is only seen through the lens of the national mission and not as a physiological and physical experience. The impression is that the figure is cut out of paper (Kowalczyk, 2003:11). When one looks closely at this figure it is easy to see that Matka Polka is actually a veneer. Like Mary, her usefulness is only seen through her maternal role, she is the 'Lord's maid' and her meaningfulness is only valued through her role as a mother (Bierca, 2006:121). The Virgin Mary is utilised then to promote a very particular vision of femininity. In a country where the overwhelming majority of people declare Catholicism as their faith, women's social roles seen through the Marian figure are propagated by the clergy according to traditional theology. Reliance upon and compliance with men's dominant position, obedience and submission, and self-sacrifice for the good of others, are just some of the vital elements employed in the Catholic Church and

passed on to the national rhetoric on womanhood. Although such an essentialising interpretation of Mary's role has been the subject of critique within feminist theology,⁵² it is impossible to ignore the impact that the meaning of the Virgin Mary has had on the conservative Catholic tradition and the way women's lives and identities are manipulated in Poland. As such she continues to be fervently worshiped by many and continues to be used to reproduce particular constructions of selfless motherhood. It is the self-sacrificial aspect of motherhood that links the Virgin Mary with the myth of Matka Polka and is important to consider here as this feature of the coping mother continues to circumscribe the demands of maternal work in the post-communist Poland.

The significance of Catholicism for the formation of national discourses on the 'appropriate' versions of femininity exceeds, however, the application of the Virgin Mary as an ideal model of womanhood. The political involvement of the Church has been an important and powerful element of the unfolding post-communist reality, which had a major impact on the formulation of abortion policy in Poland. While the issue of abortion mobilised many Polish women for the first time since the collapse of the system and heralded the emergence of feminism in Poland, ultimately it also became central to women's loss of control over their reproductive rights (Dunin, 2006; Alsop and Hockey, 2001). According to Anna Titkow, the first democratic elections in post-communist Poland (June 1989) bore witness to the 'escalation of various kinds of threats against women including threats against their identity, work, [as well as] political, public, and personal activities' (1993:254, also 1998:27). There were two important ideological foundations for such threats according to Titkow. On the one hand a drastic rejection of the post-war inheritance and everything that resembled communist doctrine produced a vacuum within the ideological context of the transformation. On the other hand, the powerful moral position of the Catholic Church meant that it became the preferential ideology to fill this vacuum (Titkow, 1998:27; Renne, 1997:1). Considering traditional constructions of women's roles endorsed by the Church helps to illuminate the potential dangers for women's identities (Eberts, 1998; Snitow, 1993). The first major legislative repercussion of this ideological shift was the attempt to implement a complete ban on abortion.⁵³ Similar discussions were taking place in other Central and Eastern European countries however nowhere other than Poland did the religious authority play such a powerful role. The Church, building on its power and popularity earned during communism, tried to translate its teachings regarding the protection of human life (from conception) into the legal realm by (audaciously) entering the political arena.⁵⁴ The successful attempts at influencing the policy and public discourse offered the Catholic

Church and its representatives a central position in the public life shaping women's identities and diminishing the level of control the Polish women have over their bodies.

The abortion debate would be perhaps the most controversial and socially divisive area of the Church's involvement in public life. 'The crux of the controversy', as Gagnere (1993) has noted, around the abortion debate rests upon not abortion itself but the way it was conducted. The anti-abortion campaign that the Church and its fervent 'pro-life' devotees embarked on was a large-scale project with intense, multifaceted, and even vicious acts that represented a direct threat to women's rights (Fuszara, 1991; Nowakowska, 1997; Eberts, 1998; Graff, 2003a; Szczuka, 2004). The use of a specific 'pro-life' discourse and linguistic manipulations in the abortion discussions resulted in words such as 'foetus' and 'pregnancy' being replaced by 'unborn child' and 'protection of life from conception.' This in turn imposed certain ways of thinking, talking and evaluating the abortion issue, which were clearly rooted in religion. By using unambiguous discourse, the main characters—women—were being objectified as if pregnancy was a 'self-contained, independent, and separate entity from the woman's body' (Graff, 2003a:111-151). Such language did not allow talk of women's rights because the word 'woman' disappeared from the discussion. The dominant voices belonged to the male representatives of society; politicians, priests, and physicians.

Questions around the relationship between the state and a woman's body have long been at the centre of the feminist concern well beyond Poland. Over 40 years earlier, Betty Friedan (1969) put forward an argument during her speech on the repeal of abortion laws in the United States, where she questioned: 'What right has any man to say to any woman—you must bear this child? What right has any state to say?' arguing further that 'only one voice needs to be heard on the question whether a woman will, or will not, bear a child and that is the voice of the woman herself' (Friedan, 1976:170-171). In Poland, however, that voice was never listened to as members of the Parliament 'refused to see women as moral adults and social agents' conducting the discussions under the auspices of a major influencing force—the Catholic Church (Snitow, 1993:556). Even though the vast majority of Poles were against the abortion restrictions the government refused to listen to the public calls for a referendum claiming 'it is too important a decision to leave it in the hands of ... the public' (Renne, 1997:4). The Episcopate's main argument was that 'the right to life could never be subjected to people's opinion' (Eberts, 1998:824).⁵⁵ The partiality inscribed in the claims about 'the right to life' continues to be one of the main illustrations on how the rights of Polish women to control their bodies are ignored and marginalised. This also represents the influential position the representatives of the Catholic Church held in Poland and allowed them to subsequently advance and encourage the government to disregard its people. The

importance of the influence the Catholic Church has had on the constructions of womanhood and motherhood in Poland becomes apparent through the essentialising accounts of womanhood offered by the older participants in this study. Some aspects of the motherhood accounts produced can be seen as visibly shaped by the religious instructions.

The abortion debate has been significant because the introduction of the abortion bill which allows the termination of a pregnancy in only a few, highly restricted instances, highlights the discriminatory practices to which women in the post-1989 Poland have been subjected.⁵⁶ For many, the result of the bill represented a 'serious attack on civil liberties' (Eberts, 1991:824). Clearly, as Snitow argues, the right to abort 'is about more than terminating pregnancy—[it is] about women's citizenship, sexuality, freedom and work' (1993:557). The abortion debate was a controversial topic for years to follow. In 1996 an amendment to the bill was introduced which permitted abortion on social grounds—for example in the case of a woman having difficult financial or personal circumstances. However, only one year later in 1997 a Constitutional Tribunal reversed this decision claiming the amendment was in conflict with fundamental law and so constitutional regulations concerning a human's right to life were reinstated.

The abortion law in Poland still provokes fervent discussion, especially amongst feminists. This is because of the way the bill revision was implemented and due to its vague language. Yet, one major positive outcome of the abortion debate was that a women's movement was galvanised (Nowicka, 1994; Kulczycki, 1995; Feffer, 1992; Jankowska, 1991). As Wanda Nowicka notes, 'the more vociferously anti-abortionists and the Catholic Church tried to stop the movement the better the people understood that the struggle for legal abortion was part of the struggle for real democracy' (1994:154). Although the movement failed to secure a referendum, it probably prevented a more restrictive law from being passed. Furthermore, even though the new law satisfied almost no one, as it did not fully meet the demands of any side in the debate, it did provoke at least some sort of recognition of those who were the main subjects of the debate—Polish women (Kulczycki, 1995:485; Faffer, 1992:123). Being an important and distinctive manifestation of women's engagement in matters that directly affect their lives, it subsequently helped to secure electoral support for the organisers of this movement (Kulczycki, 1995:485). This situation also prompted many Polish women to be more aware of their 'rights'. What might have seemed to them to be equality during the communist era became in the new democratic period a struggle to salvage their dignity, as '[the] dignity of [a] woman ... is violated forever if she does not have the right to control her own reproductive process' (Friedan, 1976:171). In spite of the fact that reproduction must not necessarily be inscribed in maternal work, in the context of the essentialising discourses

which characterise democracy after communism, Polish women continue to be instrumentalised and seen in relation to their biology by both the government and Church.

Democracy after Communism: The Masculinisation of the Public Sphere

The collapse of the communist system led to the relocation of men from the background to the foreground. As I have argued so far, the way the public and the private spheres operated during the communist era had significantly influenced the extent to which men and women were able (or not) to realise their traditionally understood gendered roles. Additionally, communist propaganda on the equality of sexes and women's supposed emancipation contributed to the reconstructions and redefinitions of the responsibilities traditionally associated with men's and women's social roles. The changes caused by the post-communist transformations have provided new and often challenging environments for both men and women in terms of their identification with 'appropriate' gendered roles and responsibilities. Various studies have noted significant conceptual (and practical) shifts in gender relations as a result of changing constructions of femininities and masculinities prompted by the processes of the transformation.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the individualised strategies employed by men and women in negotiating the new reality have triggered an enduring route that is leading not only to a change in 'hegemonic ideals of female and male identities, but also the everyday relations between men and women' (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000:151). In order to make sense of these changes some groups have been able to utilise different strategies that have included resisting or taking advantage of emerging opportunities. For example, as the findings in this thesis demonstrate, some women have been able to re-negotiate traditionally constituted gender relations with the fathers of their children. For example, the younger cohort described relations with their male partners as egalitarian and their husbands/partners as 'involved fathers'. These descriptions have been shaped by the participants' more privileged positions: they live in large urban areas, have higher levels of education and have pursued professional careers which emphasise self-satisfaction and individuality. As such, these women take advantage of their greater opportunities to engage with the discourses of the liberated worker and can be seen as more able to claim the novel identity of the 'New Polish Woman' than women from other social positions. For the majority of women (and men) the re-constructions of their social roles entail both resisting and accepting different aspects of the new visions and representations of femininities (and masculinities) offered by the post-1989 period (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000:151).

Similarly to other post-communist countries, the economic and political changes in Poland have at the same time been accompanied by an emphasis on more traditional masculine and feminine roles (Watson, 1993b; Klingman, 1996; Stukuls, 1999; Gapova, 2002). In highlighting the importance of reclaiming the 'essential' vocations of women and men, the Catholic Church and right-wing political parties embarked on promoting and idealising the traditional Polish family. This context bore witness to the re-emergence of the image of Matka Polka whose power has been employed once again to manipulate women's lives; this time emphasising its maternal aspect linked exclusively with the home realm. As argued by Seibert, such an amalgamation of traditional forms of social control (for example the Church), with neoliberal discourses, illustrates the complexity of contemporary Poland in which 'people are encouraged to look back and accept at least partially the values and beliefs dominant in the nineteenth century' (2001:92). This complexity is reflected vividly in the concept of the 'New Polish Woman'. As I have argued earlier, this supposedly novel representation of womanhood still enmeshes both production and reproduction. On the one hand, it emphasises the neoliberal discourses that promote professional work and careers, and on the other, it echoes the Church's calls for women to realise their 'true' maternal selves through motherhood. Its multifaceted construction signals women's capacities to take advantage of this novel identity in unequal ways. But this novel identity also highlights the hegemonic demands of the culturally defined representations of womanhood. Whilst women are portrayed through this image as able to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by the free market, they are also unable to escape their stereotypical roles as mothers. Thus, the 'New Polish Woman' is both the modern and liberated worker but also a patriotic, nurturing and devoted mother (Seibert, 2001). Ultimately then, the 'new' in the 'New Polish Woman' is only illusory as the representations and constructions of the contemporary Polish woman closely resemble the concept of the coping mother of the communist era.

The apparent return to more traditionally understood roles for men and women has been illuminated by the masculinisation of the public sphere and has its roots in the communist era. As I have already argued, the way the public-private dichotomy operated during communism enhanced patriarchy and traditionally defined gendered identities. Yet, paradoxically, some of the normative components of those traditional gendered identities could not actually be fully accomplished due to the legacy, ideology, and institutional framework of the system (Watson, 1993a:472-473). As the majority of women were in full-time employment, they were not able to devote themselves fully to the domestic sphere. Similarly, in a state-controlled public sphere there was no space for men to 'exercise masculine power and initiative' nor were professional career advancements available outside

of the party membership (Watson, 1993a:472). Due to the lack of options to utilise the real power in the communist public domain, men often withdraw to what could be defined as emasculated positions within the home realm. Here, they became the blurred characters of the communist reality with women occupying the foreground in their everyday struggles.

The events surrounding the collapse of the communist system offered to many men an opportunity to reclaim, or experience for the first time, their socially accepted patriarchal gender roles. Research on male activists working in anti-communist opposition indicates that men's passionate pursuit for change from 'passivity and helplessness', which were seen as defining characteristics of the 'normal model of life' during communism, represented in fact an urge fuelled by men's supposedly essentialist need to act (Szwajcer, cited in Watson, 1993:484). Once the process of entering public life commenced, many women's active participation in sustaining the opposition movement was trivialised and forgotten (Penn, 2003; 2005). For men, the chance to finally fight during the breakthrough events meant that they at last had the prospect to re-create hegemonic male identities. Consequently, the process of rebuilding the country became the men's domain. Women were left to retreat to the home realm, which has again been propagated in the post-communist era as their feminine duty. Men had risen from a less clearly defined position in the home and entered the public sphere to regain and/or assert their masculinity in a way that under communist rule had been denied them. At the same time, women could apparently relish the process of domestication. As a result, some scholars argue that the masculinisation of the transformation resulted in a revitalisation of a patriarchal society (Domański, 1995; Graff 2003a). Women's intended retraction, but also their subsequent enforced exclusion from the new public sphere, prompted processes which led to the 'de-grading of feminine identity' (Watson, 1993:485).⁵⁸ This foray into politics and the subsequent retreat back to traditional gender roles illuminates the ways in which women's bodies were objectified and their identities circumscribed by the promotion and exhortation on the legislative level. Some of these women activists possibly did it willingly – to let their men regain their masculinity, and, perhaps to even 'catch breath' and retire into the security of home.

Reflecting the wider trend across Eastern Europe, Polish women's activism has been marginalised in the democracy after communism, contributing further to the masculinisation of the public sphere. Many Polish women who had actively participated in underground work, or were active politically in the communist structures, found their interests were often sacrificed and their accomplishments marginalised once the system collapsed⁵⁹. As Watson notes, the 'natural' and silent exclusion of women from the 'power of the empowered' is not unique to Poland as it has been 'an essential aspect of change in all of the countries of

Eastern Europe' (1993:473). For example, what has been seen by Hungarian feminists as the vocal presence of women during the dissident actions simply disappeared in the new political environment (Kiss, 1991). Similarly, in Germany, women's activism turned out to be 'irrelevant' after the unification (Dölling, 1991). In Czechoslovakia, women's presence in the official power structures was 'hardly represented' (Jancar, 1985; Einhorn, 1991). This regrettably appears a common pattern in that women's political mobilisation in the name of independence is quickly followed by strenuous efforts to dismiss their involvement.⁶⁰ Yuval-Davis has noted that women's expanded roles during the times of war or crisis are usually quickly reversed at the end of the upheaval because the shift in the boundaries of the sexual division of labour is only temporary and most crucially 'dictated by the perceived necessary role of men' (i.e. that of a fighter, conspirer or activist) and not because the perception of women's role has changed (1985:652). Similarly, during the major modern revolutions in France, Russia, and China, women's interests were often sacrificed in favour of accommodating those of the formerly oppressed males (Lorber, 1994:254-255).

The examples of women's marginalisation in struggles for freedom provided above illuminate the discriminatory and submissive positioning of women, even when the struggle appears to be focused on securing non gender specific universal rights of freedom and equality. The guiding principle for any democratic society is that a 'free, equal and rational individual can flourish' (Browning, 2000:152). Feminist theorists, and most notably Carol Pateman (1985; 1988), have long argued that the construction of liberal theory is coloured with masculinist bias.⁶¹ Pateman's extensive work includes the argument that the preconception of liberal theory is concealed in essentialising constructions of public and private spheres. As noted for example by Molyneux, 'the liberal construct of the individual has been shown to be an abstraction postulated upon a masculine ideal and associated with public life whereas relations between the sexes and the work within the private sphere were naturalised, as was woman's subordination within marriage' (2000:36). The vast majority of feminist enquiry has focused on challenging the gendered undertones that lay beneath the civil contract of liberal politics with the aim of redefining the terms on which women are inscribed into the concept of citizenship (e.g. Eisenstein, 1981; Landes, 1988). As the post-revolutionary situation in other countries has demonstrated, the aspect of the communist structure that survives revolution is that of patriarchal power. This is a feature of the transformation which remains all too visible in post-communist Poland (see e.g. Vaughan, 2000).

The masculinisation of the public sphere that followed the collapse of the communist system reasserted the enduring discrimination against women in Poland reinforcing patriarchal

attitudes that permeate the public discourse on family policies and women's social roles. This also illuminates sexist aspects of Polish culture, where gendered Romantic myths continue to operate in public discourses and public consciousness. Drawing on the research from the forgotten stories of women that created and helped to sustain Solidarność during the 1980s, American scholar Shana Penn (2005) shows how it took her some time to penetrate Polish culture sufficiently to be able to comprehend that:

... a Polish woman's iconic duty, which began evolving in the late eighteenth century, is to mother the struggling nation ... [she] must carry out this culturally prescribed role heroically, anonymously, and without dreams of her own fulfilment. For her sacrifice, strength, and faultless virtue, she will be rewarded with an elevated status in her family, with odes to her moral authority, and with much hand kissing (2005:16).

The cultural shifts in modern Poland bear witness to the revival of the symbolic codes of masculinity and femininity which have permeated the public, parliamentary and clerical discussions on the importance of the idealised traditional Polish family. The revival of the normative ideals regarding women's roles has, in turn, contributed to the emergence of new representations of 'appropriate' and 'attractive' womanhood. This novel identity is promoted and glorified in the media through the image of the 'New Polish Woman'. Yet again it is the Polish mother who is expected to cope with meeting these competing and often unrealistic demands.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined changing constructions of motherhood and demonstrated the obduracy of specific ideals associated with 'appropriate' womanhood in Poland. My analysis in this chapter has exposed the continuities in how Polish women have been defined through their roles as selfless, devoted and coping mothers. The concept of the coping mother, particularly in its invocation as Matka Polka, has been exploited by various players throughout history to manipulate women's lives. I argue that in post-communist Poland, the coping Polish mother has become revamped as the 'New Polish Woman'. I also have demonstrated how demands of social acceptability at the time of partitioning pressured women into specific forms of maternal work. These required childcare to be enmeshed with a strong patriotic upbringing. As the guardians of tradition and national identity, Polish mothers have historically possessed an important role in social and political life. In this chapter I have also analysed how women's mass mobilisation into the workforce in the former Soviet Bloc countries was stimulated by an ideology of supposed gender equality and

resulted in a double-burden for women. A family's material needs and a woman's professional aspirations were linked with the growing levels of educational attainment as well as with the social support offered through employment. All these were important motives for women to take up work outside the home during the communist era. Indeed, the state support for family and its welfare services facilitated, to some extent, women's entry into the labour market. However, this led to the creation of a role model where the responsibilities linked with professional and family life as well as running a household were all enmeshed and associated almost exclusively with women.

The collapse of the communist system has been characterised by both the masculinisation of the public sphere and the marginalisation of women's work during the communist era. The growing authority of the Catholic Church and its calls for women to return to their 'true' roles as mothers has also been a significant change, especially when set against neoliberal values of the independent and ideal worker. The 'New Polish Woman' might be a successful and autonomous worker but she also must be a mother, which is equally what was expected from women during the communist era. In the following chapter I demonstrate how this new representation in the context of dramatically stratified society means that it is only some groups of women who are able to take advantage of the possibilities provided by the neoliberal discourses and can attempt to engage with this new construction of Polish womanhood.

Chapter 3

Post-Communist Motherhood

Introduction

The idea of Poland being divided according to social class is anathema in the context of a communist state. In the 100 years before communist control, Poland's social dynamic mirrored its Western neighbours – a landed aristocracy which preserved the national consciousness and encumbered government and culture. The new post-1989 stratification that was precipitated by the transformation to democracy has once again divided the nation economically. The economic power and the demands of the market have been shaping in novel, and often difficult, ways individual choices, freedom and agency. This chapter examines the social consequences of the post-communist transformations on the Polish society with the main focus on the effects it has had on motherhood. It provides the theoretical and conceptual context for the data analysis that forms the empirical research element of the thesis.

The discussion in this chapter is aimed at demonstrating the shifting contexts of the lives of Polish mothers in the post-communist era. In spite of the dominant discourse, for the majority of women the experience of being a mother has become a greater burden when compared with the previous era. The state's withdrawal from its previously offered assistance has diversified and stratified what had previously been a more unified experience. Yet, in contemporary Poland womanhood is often essentialised and propagated in the mass media through a hegemonic representation of the 'New Polish Woman': her successful professional life resonates with the neoliberal values of the liberated worker but simultaneously, she is a devoted and nurturing mother. As I have demonstrated throughout this thesis, the neoliberal demands on women contributed to the stratification of their mothering experiences, therefore the media-promoted image of the successful and liberated woman indiscriminately portraying all women as the supposed 'winners' excludes the majority of Polish mothers who do not fit the popularised picture. Importantly, the fusion of expectations embedded in this supposedly novel representation of the 'New Polish Woman' points to the reflection that this post-communist democratic-liberal construction of motherhood does not offer Polish women a new and liberating model for mothering but is

merely a revamped and rehabilitated version of the traditional concept of the coping mother – an oppressive mumpsimus in stylish disguise.

I begin this chapter by setting the context for the changing social structures. Growing unemployment following the collapse of the communist system gave rise to a new type of poverty constituted mainly by rural families with children who are labelled as the ‘new poor’ (Hörschelmann, 2004:230). The experiences of mothers from these impoverished groups stand in stark contrast to how the ideals of womanhood and motherhood are propagated in the mass media. This chapter offers an analysis of how the post-communist transformation bore witness to the growing pauperisation of Polish society and contributed to the polarising effects on women’s experiences of motherhood. It traces changes in the state policies regarding motherhood, the shifts in the labour market, and the strong position of the Church. It also examines a group of Polish women who have held privileged socio-economic positions and thus could be seen as the beneficiaries of the transformation. Whilst exposing deepening differences between women’s experiences as mothers, the discussion in this chapter provides a broader context that illuminates the specificities of my sample.

In offering analysis of the stratified Polish society in the post-communist era, this chapter exposes discrimination and differences between various groups. It reveals inequalities between men and women as well as amongst women. Ultimately, it argues that the collapse of the communist system has had adverse consequences for Polish motherhood.

Setting the Context of the Changing Social Structures

As noted in Chapter 1, the shifts from communism to democracy have changed the social structure of Poland in various, dramatic ways. Rapid unemployment became a reality for thousands of people causing further social problems including poverty, marginalisation, pathology and passivity.⁶² As unemployment and poverty have become the markers of the democratic Poland, women have been positioned in sociological studies as those who have been affected most by the shifts (Desperak, 2009a; 2009b; Weiner, 2007). In particular, the lives of women from the rural areas, with lower educational levels and large families to care for, illuminate polarising consequences of the post-communist transformation. In the previous chapter, I argued that the transformation has been accompanied by tendencies towards reinforcing more traditionally understood roles for men and women. Importantly, as highlighted by Watson, the rise of masculinism has been accompanied also by the ‘rise of class’ (2000:375). In a society that under communism was often described as homogenous,

this 'rise of class' resulted in and exposed social polarisation and disparity. In post-1989 Poland, access to power and wealth became the main indicator of an individual's position in the changing social structure. Education and vocational attainment, geographical location, age, and gender have become the most important determinants for social mobility.

The 1989 socio-political shifts have substantially modified the texture of everyday life for many people. The dramatic changes in the national economy reshaped working environments and employment structures, reshuffling the structure of the Polish society. For example, families living in rural regions are now more likely to be culturally and socio-economically disadvantaged. The primary inequality arises in this group from poor education and limited state assistance available to families. The state-owned enterprises in the communist era provided these families with relatively secure jobs for life, without the need for high levels of education. The extensive de-industrialisation and massive labour shedding caused by privatisation has led to the growth of new forms of employment and unplanned sectoral restructuring. The sectoral restructuring, particularly in the bigger cities, has created new jobs in the lucrative financial sector and additionally expanded the low-paid, low status service sectors (Smith *et al.*, 2008:284). This in turn has broadened the segmentation of labour markets and created new social divisions. Pay differentials and a competitive employment environment have revolutionised the social landscape. This labour market restructuring has led to social instability, geographical marginalisation, labour migration and the new fear of employment insecurity. For many, these shifts in 'materialities and subjectivities of class' (Smith *et al.*, 2008:284) caused by the labour market differentiation turned the social landscape into something profoundly unfamiliar and disorientating (Parvu, 2005:73). Consequently, these changes have become sources of uncertainty, anxiety and increasing unemployment.

The scale of the problem of unemployment in contemporary Poland is obvious when the data from both periods are compared. According to the national census, just before the transformation (1988) the number of people of working age⁶³ in Poland was 21.8 million, with 18.2 million employed. The employment rate (percentage of those employed who were at legal working age) was 83.5 percent leaving only 16.5 percent (3.6 million) of people registered as unemployed (Kabaj and Danecka, 2005:114). In 2002, the working age population reached 23.6 million with only 13.2 million employed, which means that there were 5 million fewer people who had a job than 14 years earlier. The economically inactive population had risen to 56 percent, meaning that over half of the population of working age were without paid work (*ibid*). In 2004, in 33 percent of families in Poland someone was affected by the problem of unemployment (Kabaj and Danecka, 2005:122). Sociologists,

however, have argued that the unemployment rates are in fact significantly higher. An additional one million unregistered individuals should be considered according to Kozak (2005:153). Whilst the 2008 data shows that the unemployment rate dropped below 10 percent (from the highest figures in 2004 of over 20 percent), with the latest figure registered at 13 percent in January 2010, a secure paid job is still a likely prospect for only a minority of people of working age in Poland (data from Główny Urząd Statystyczny).

Unemployment in Poland has been argued to be the new poverty which has affected a disproportionately high number of women. Those most affected by the new poverty are mothers of large families residing in the rural areas and this trend is observed throughout Eastern and Central Europe and described as a life-long, intergenerational, abject destitution and social isolation (Emigh and Szelényi, 2001). In Poland, this new poverty is typified by its often long-term character, low service sector income, high numbers of children affected⁶⁴ and regional stratification. During the communist era poverty did not exist officially and scholarly investigations of poverty looked at 'spheres of low incomes, deficiency or unsatisfied social needs' instead (Tarkowska, 2001:83). These were addressed as family dysfunctions and there was no related legislation to counteract the problem. Regardless of the preferent rhetoric, poverty in socialist Poland always existed: in the countryside and in large rural families, in towns and in the households of unskilled workers, in the elderly population, the disabled, the single-parent families, and in the families affected by alcoholism and crime. Acknowledging the heritage of the communist era is facilitated by the path-dependency theoretical approach, which offers recognition of such elements of the past and recognises that such dependencies can and almost certainly will shape the present. The difference between the communist era poverty and the post-transformation poverty is the appearance of a new group – the unemployed.

The importance of a careful consideration of the problem of unemployment-based poverty is that it helps to contextualise the transformation's polarising effects on the experiences of motherhood in post-communist Poland offering a chance to demonstrate the varied and often contrasting realities of individual lives. The rising numbers of unemployed and those affected by the resulting poverty have been the most apparent consequences of the unfolding political and economic shifts. During the critical phase of the 'Great Change' between 1998 and 2004 (as opposed to the earlier phase in the years 1989-1998)⁶⁵ the numbers of unemployed almost doubled, from 10.4 percent in 1998 to 19.0 percent in 2004. The statistic tracks the figures of those registered as living below the official poverty line – from 12.1 percent in 1998 up to 19.2 percent in 2004.⁶⁶ Yet neither does employment guarantee financial health. Those occupying the lowest income ranks are also highly likely to fall

within the official definition of poverty (Kabaj and Danecka, 2005:136). According to the Polish Central Statistical Office rural families with children, large families and single mothers are most prone to the dangers of impoverishment:

- In 2005 almost 19 percent of individuals and families living in villages and small towns were living below the subsistence minimum⁶⁷ as compared to 8 percent living in the large conurbations;
- Over 63 percent of families with four or more children lived below the official poverty line in 2005 as compared to 7.5 percent of families with just one child and 2.3 percent of couples without children. The Office also notes this 'large family' group has a high proportion of young couples (under 44 years old) with children;
- Households where women are either unemployed or stay-at-home mothers are also at high risk.

Other groups likely to be affected by the new poverty include:

- Those relying on other sources of income, such as benefits or alimony (this group does not include pensioners). In 2004, 43 percent lived below the official poverty line compared to 18.7 percent of those with independent means;
- Manual labourers and those with very low education levels;
- Farmers. Nearly 31 percent lived below the official poverty line in 2004.

These statistics rank Poland among the poorest of the 27 new members of the European Union. In 1989 there were 16.3 percent of people living below the social minimum level; five years later in 1994 the figure was almost three and a half times higher: at 54 percent of the population (Golinowska, cited in Tarkowska, 2001:90). In the early nineties, the Central Statistical Office in Poland (GUS) reported that more than 25 percent of Polish families were unable to buy the cheapest food and clothes and the figure for families headed by single mothers was even more dramatic: around 45 percent found financial survival difficult (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1994:24). In 2002, almost 60 percent of Poles lived in households where the level of everyday expenses was lower than the level accepted as the social minimum; the standard of living in these households was also below the official poverty line (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2003). In their 2005 evaluation of the socio-economic situation of the country, Kabaj and Danecka argued that the rising trend in unemployment and the worsening living standards of the population would envelope the whole country in institutional poverty (2005:138). Furthermore, while the authors of the 2004 World Bank Report assessed poverty in Poland as a 'permanent' feature, a 2008 Eurostat report showed that 21 percent of the Polish population cannot afford to have a meal

with meat, chicken or fish (or a vegetarian nutritional equivalent) every other day. Twenty percent cannot keep their home adequately warm and 63 percent cannot afford to pay for a one week annual holiday away from home (Eurostat, 2008).

These statistics on poverty do not immediately reveal the dramatic consequences that the 'new poverty' is having on women. Studies show, however, that women in Poland with a lower educational status, living in rural areas and of older age, are over represented in the category 'underclass' and constitute the majority of the 'new poverty' (Domański, 2002:383). The notion of an underclass has long been operating in Western societies and pertains to those individuals who have been driven into extreme economic marginality, often due to long-term unemployment (Tarkowska, 2002a). Such extreme economic marginality not only affects individual lives, but has a dramatic impact on the experiences of motherhood, family life, gender relations within the home sphere and gender inequality.⁶⁸ Poverty is more than the simple scarcity of money. Beyond its economic sense, the term 'poverty' embodies a multidimensional isolation from the participation in society and the individual's experience of self worth on the social, political and ideological level (Curtin *et al.*, 1996; Nolan and Whelan, 1996:225). The impoverished families are exposed to material, social and cultural deprivation and the post-communist transformation has dramatically changed the shape of the societal constitution. With large numbers of families exposed to stratification and inequality, women as the emblematic figureheads of the home realm, have a significant struggle ahead of them.

The telling statistics discussed in this section stand in stark contrast to how the articulations of the image of the 'New Polish Woman', driven by the neoliberal metanarrative, project contemporary womanhood. With the daily struggle for survival, the ideal of the glamorised working mother stands in contrast to the living conditions and contexts of the majority of Polish mothers. Only a very narrow and specific group of women can relate to and attempt to claim this supposedly desirable identity of the 'New Polish Woman'. Residing in urban agglomerations, with high levels of education and relatively stable employment, the candidates for this novel identity are represented by the younger cohort interviewed for this research project. Their narratives analysed later on in this thesis offer a unique insight into the individual lived experiences of the assumed beneficiaries of the transformation. Significantly, the data reveals that despite their privileged socio-economic position they too have been affected by the negative consequences of the transformation specific to motherhood in Poland (see Chapter 5).

Continuities and Changes in Discrimination Against Women in Poland

The introduction of a free market economy in the 1990s not only diversified post-communist societies but also deepened existing inequalities between men and women. Writing five years after the Berlin Wall came down, Myra Marx Ferree (1995) coined the phrase 'women are losers'. The phrase reflects the reality of many women's lives, not only in Germany but in all other post-Soviet countries (Ferree, 1995:10; Duke and Grime, 1997:884). Women in the economies of Eastern Europe have been more disadvantaged in the labour market and in social life than men (Popova, 2002). The historical income discrepancies survived the transformation as did the differences in the practices of employment. Despite generally higher levels of education among women, the old doctrines continued to hold weight and women remain visibly discriminated against in terms of employment opportunities, income and promotions (Golinowska, 2002:25; Domański, 2002; Desperak, 2009b). As I have demonstrated earlier, the growing inequalities between men and women generally position women as those disproportionately more affected by the transformation than men. These inequalities are evident when examining some of the existing data, which situates women as a disadvantaged group within the polarised landscape of post-communist Poland. For example, research conducted in 2000 indicated that women in Poland were on average paid 42 percent less than men (Domański, 2002:392). More recent data shows that income discrimination may be down to around 30 percent but it varies from 10 percent to as high as 50 percent in the case of upper management and executive jobs (Eurostat; Duch-Krzysztozek and Sarata, 2007). Research also indicates that there is no direct correlation between the growing numbers of women who have high levels of education and women's income or employment security. Unsurprising then is also the fact that the gender gap in income increases for each year spent in further education. The additional education gained by women affects a much lower rise in their income than a matching profile does for men (Desperak, 2009b). Overall, gender is a better predictor of the likelihood of poverty than education or type of career, significantly problematising the categories of transformational 'winners' and 'losers'.

Since the beginning of the transformation, women's status in the labour market shows deteriorating trends, which contribute to but also are conditioned by their disadvantaged position in the new democratic reality. Before the transformation, employment rates for women in Poland were the highest in Europe (Coyle, 2007:6). This was due to the principles of the classless society where everyone was obligated to work. Employment was guaranteed by the State to all people of working age and unemployment was illegal. Currently (2010),

48.3 percent of all women of working age are either actively employed or seeking employment. This means that 51.7 percent of all women aged 15 or over are either not in work or are not actively seeking paid work. There is an important sub group identified as the 'dejected' (GUS, 2008:22) who are not seeking employment believing that they will not find it anyway.

Analysis of the trends within the economic activity of working age population between 1988 and 2010 indicates that the overall figures for men and women have been steadily and continuously declining from 65.3 percent (in 1988) to 55.7 percent (in 2010) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny). When examining the employment trends by sex for the same period, the percentage of women in work has been in continuous decline since the beginning of the transformation and only in 2010 showed an increase (48.3 percent). The figure for women's activity rate in 1988 was 57.0 percent and in 1992 - 54.2 percent, with the lowest levels of 46.6 percent registered in 2008. In contrast, since 2002 the percentage of men employed has risen year on year (from 74.3 percent in 1988 the decline continued to reach its lowest levels of 62.6 in 2002 to then rise steadily to reach 64.0 percent in 2010). Significantly, the overall downward trend is entirely skewed by women's economic activity, which almost makes women the best representatives of the society, those who carry the burden of the transformation with its most dramatic consequences, such as unemployment, poverty, and marginalisation.⁶⁹ The trend also implies a possible endemic malaise in the acceptance of women in the work place, especially in the years after 2004 following the 'Great Change'. Two important factors may account for this: Poland's entry into the European Union (EU) and the legislative changes in relation to parental leave introduced at the same time. The influx of foreign capital and investment that followed Poland's EU membership altered the labour market landscape and reinforced the neoliberal work ethos. Childcare leave was reduced from 3 to 2 years and availability restrictions were introduced as to who was eligible and what level of benefit would be available. These factors contributed to some women finding it more challenging to enter, stay or re-enter the labour market, especially if having children (CBOS, 2006; Ciecieląg and Tomaszewski, 2003; Klinger, 2009).

The emergence of the post-1989 unemployment has further reinforced discrimination against women. According to Główny Urząd Statystyczny (2007), since the early 1990s the unemployment rate of men ranged between 12 percent in 1992 to its 18 percent high in 2002. Women's unemployment for the same period followed similar fluctuations but each year the levels were higher on average by 4 percent. The rural/urban comparison mirrors this trend where women in both areas were affected more severely than men and, while revealing a striking increase in unemployed women living in the rural areas in the late 1990s, it most

remarkably reinforces gender as the most prominent factor contributing to unemployment-related poverty in Poland.

The 'feminisation of poverty' has been one of the negative characteristics of the transformation and the phrase illustrates the predominance of women in the poor population (Tarkowska, 2002b:412). Reading Tarkowska, despite the fact that at the beginning of the transformation women became unemployed less frequently, it was much more difficult for them to re-enter the job market. They were therefore victims of long-term unemployment. Various other studies show that the new poverty is gendered on different levels of social life: the labour market and in state welfare, the family and the household.⁷⁰ Amongst the main symptoms of the feminisation of poverty in Poland the researchers cite women's unequal position in the labour market, their long-term unemployment and their difficulties with re-entering the job market. Female economic inequalities also include the fact that women earn on average 20-30 percent less than men (and their pensions are typically 30 percent lower) so in addition to the social and physical obligations of being a mother and running a household, poverty for women often means additional chores, more responsibilities and less spare time (Tarkowska, 2009a:5).

As I have argued so far in this chapter, gender and poverty are importantly linked in post-communist Poland. The fact that women form the majority of those affected by unemployment, poverty and marginalisation circumscribes greatly their abilities to meet and fulfil their social role as mothers. A micro-level perspective on the real experiences within the household reveals the close relationship between gender and poverty in Poland and how it affects the experience of motherhood (Tarkowska, 2002b; 2001; Reszke, 2001). For example, under conditions of poverty the responsibility for the day-to-day survival of the family requires additional effort and is shown to burden women on a more complex level than men (Tarkowska 2002b). Financial resources, time constraints, general ability (even if only assumed) and available energy form an important framework in which women's experiences as mothers and their gendered position within the household should be analysed (Gordon, 2000; Johnson and Lloyd, 2004; Gatrell, 2008). Studies on impoverished families show that on top of the regular duties of being a mother and wife, women are faced with balancing the difficult financial situation of the family. One of these additional responsibilities is linked with the concept of the 'female managed system of budgeting'. The woman is effectively in charge of the family finances (Pahl, 1989). Contrary to what could seem to be a good basis for a higher position in the family, the responsibility of managing a limited family budget is more orientated to the idea of women's better knowledge of prices, greater skill in saving money and better knowledge of children's needs. In a situation where

finances are limited, however, this becomes a heavy obligation rather than a means of control and power or a source of prestige for the woman (Tarkowska, 2002b:420). Similarly, it mainly falls to the woman to secure any supplementary income that may be required, whether it is additional seasonal work, home production of preserves or applying for institutional support. Consequently, regardless of the level of income of the father as the traditional bread winner, the mother as the informal manager of the household is burdened with the responsibility for the financial success of the family unit.

As I have noted earlier, the post-communist transformation bore witness to the revival of traditional religious gender roles and relations. This revival of the past traditions can again be theorised by the path-dependency approach. The tendency towards home orientation articulated by the Catholic Church supported the restoration of the myth of Matka Polka. In her modern incarnation Matka Polka presents a patriotic and selfless form of motherhood, which is seen by researchers as a detrimental outcome of the transformation in shaping trajectories of women's lives (Duffy, 2000). This arbitrary definition of a traditional role of motherhood has been disseminated by nationalist movements and the Church as the ultimate 'essential' alternative to the forced emancipation of the communist period. In line with the patriarchal ideology, the calls for the renewal of the role of women that had existed in pre-Soviet society (i.e. the role of a mother tied to the home sphere) cause not only a reverse transformation in the workforce but have a crucial impact on women's identities (Kościańska and Hryciuk cited in Ostałowska, 2008). In such a context, constructions of gendered identities take place on the basis of particular interpretations of man/woman dualities. This, in turn, reinforces the positioning of such identities within the traditionally conceptualised public/private divide. The renewed emphasis on family values and rhetoric, which calls for women's return to the home sphere, revives and preserves communal values, patriarchal structures, and gender-role stereotyping (Kerig *et al.*, 1993; Watson, 1993a). It emphatically does not promote the autonomous self assured and individual role model that is required to redress the gendered imbalance in the labour work force and which is associated with conceptualisations of the 'New Polish Woman'.

Periods of rapid change and uncertainty have been characterised by new demands for family stability and appeals for the return to traditional roles for women (Papanek, 1994:47). This not only relates to the patterns of behaviour but, more relevantly, can re-shape the cultural symbols of femininity (Tsagarousianou, 1995:286). The increasing prevalence of traditional gender ideologies in post-communist societies has been assessed by scholars as a form of a 'backlash against communism' and can yet again best understood through the path-dependency approach (Glass and Kawachi, 2001; Einhorn, 1993; Wólchnik and Meyer,

1985). Hence, it may be seen that encouraging women to return to the home realm is an attempt to balance the more emancipatory tendencies promoted by communism (Gal and Kligman, 2000). The government and the Catholic Church in Poland have had a direct influence in controlling women's lives and bodies including their ability to claim equal rights in the labour market and claim any right to birth control. Some women in post-communist societies are seen as having greater access to many new forms of public life but simultaneously they are exposed to new forms of constraint (Walby, 1990, 1997; Harding, 1996). Women in pre-1989 Poland may have been encouraged by the communist rhetoric of emancipation but in the new democratic reality the emphasis on updated traditional gendered roles for men and women means that women are pressured to resume their so-called 'natural' roles. Such a promotion of biologically reductionist accounts of womanhood has been supported through legislative changes including the ban on abortion. Together with the impediments within the area of paid work, the environment for women in their roles as mothers has become more complex and hostile.

Motherhood Experiences and Difference

Women's essentialised role as mothers became heightened in the new privatised job market. In analysing women's employment conditions in the post-socialist milieu, researchers noted that employers in the 1990s discriminated against married women with children (Wóycicka, 2002; Kowalska, 2000). One of the decisive factors shaping women's access to the labour market is the cultural expectation that they will combine mothering with paid professional work. The decline in publicly funded support for working mothers has adversely affected women's strong integration in paid work (Pollert, 2005:216; 2003:337). The loss of jobs with a simultaneous withdrawal of some important social benefits and services (e.g. subsidised nurseries, kindergartens, doctor's surgeries, etc.) has specifically led to the increase in the number of unemployed women with children (Hörschelmann, 2004:226; Pestoff, 1996). The general presumption that all women are, or will be, mothers can create morally inappropriate situations. For instance, during job interviews women have been asked about their plans regarding children, the number of children they may already have, and even in some cases to provide a medical certificate proving that they were not already pregnant (Michalczak, 2008). Thus, as a consequence of being perceived through their traditional roles as mothers, women were very often 'hitting the glass ceiling' even though their qualifications were of an equal or even higher level than their male colleagues (Budrowska, 2004). The environment for working mothers has become conditioned by the

shifts in the occupational tradition and where the ideas around employment have become driven by neoliberal discourses with their focus on individual responsibility, achievement and coping through self-management. As the competition for paid work becomes more intense and employers more demanding the access to the labour market and childcare has become unilaterally elusive. Unemployment or even the fear of it, poverty and changes to the welfare policies, shifts in social mobility and social structures, all contribute to the deepening feeling of inequality and underpin the current stratification of motherhood.

The inequality between various groups of mothers was established early on during the transformation and has been closely linked to social and regional factors. Studies show that the greatest differentiators between women's experiences are geographical location, age and level of education (Kozak, 2005; Ingham *et al.*, 2001). Three cultural aspects affecting womanhood combine to present a macro picture of the status of Polish motherhood. Poorly educated mothers who live in the regions do not migrate and at best will be employed in the declining sectors of the economy. Wealthy females, well educated and who live in the cities, are better equipped to understand and advance themselves in the new democratic Poland (Jarosz, 2005; Domański, 2004; Jasiecki, 2005). These diverse strata impact on how 'decisions' around motherhood might be made: whether or not, or when, to have children, the number of children, the quality of healthcare the family unit and/or the state can provide for children, the schooling prospects, and women's opportunities/barriers in the labour market and their own feelings of self worth.

Women's experiences as mothers in post-1989 Poland have become more diversified than in the previous era and this has exposed differences and inequalities. Consequently, multiple studies have shown that women's attitudes towards having children have been shaped by the varying dynamics in the labour market, high levels of unemployment, and the struggle that women often experience when attempting to re-enter the marketplace after having children. For example, research conducted at the end of the 1990s indicates that over 14 percent of women did not have children as a direct result of the fear of losing employment (Kuciarska-Ciesielska *et al.*, 1999). More recent data shows that 62 percent of women declare that their fear of unemployment is a main reason for not having more children (CBOS, 2006). The threat or reality of poverty in many households in Poland informs women's decisions to become mothers: 58 percent of young people declare bad living conditions as the main reason for childlessness (CBOS, 2006). Despite the introduction of two new social benefits after the collapse of the old system—pregnancy and childcare benefits for unemployed lone parents—the share of the social support expenses (linked with assisting women) in the state budget has deteriorated over a decade from around 10 percent in 1990 to around 5 percent at

the beginning of the new millennium (Wóycicka, 2002:3). Furthermore, the cultural determinants of women's roles as mothers and home-keepers and perceived as women's 'natural' duties devalues or dismisses their work in the home. The work of the husband, however, is associated with monetary value and linked with aspects of hegemonic power and prestige. As a result, the 'services' provided by women to their families are seen as worthless from the economic perspective and have a low social status. For many young well educated women this is the greatest impediment to getting married and having children (Lisowska and Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2007:15). Amongst the diversities of individual experiences, two distinctive groups of women emerge across the economic divide coming to the same conclusion when contemplating motherhood: for one group, the fear of unemployment, poverty and further worsening of their economic status defines their reasons to not become mothers. For the other group, the rejection of motherhood is based on the need for self-investment, career development and the importance of positive perception of one's social status.

The experiences of motherhood in the post-communist era have been importantly shaped by the alterations in social support provided by the changing role of the state. The way women in their roles as mothers are perceived, supported, and positioned by the State links with the state policies but also the institutional language. While during the communist era the language was closely linked with the paternalistic character of the state and the utopian ideology of a socialist society, motherhood was seen as a woman's natural, and important, social role. The socialist politics of the pre-transformation era aimed at equalising the social position of men and women and policies were purposefully designed to help women combine their biological role with their public role of a socialist worker. Social support was known as 'social care' (Kabaj and Danecka, 2005:129). It was only after 1989 when the dramatic consequences of the transformation unfolded that the institutional social *care* was renamed 'social assistance' depriving women of the extensive and necessary support available to them in the previous era. The suspension of subsidies for social services like kindergartens, the termination of free prescription medicines, the reduction of pre-school places, childcare allowances, sick benefit, pensions and cuts in housing benefits, were just a few of the 'democratic' policies that undermine motherhood today (Hörschelmann, 2004:238).

These changes, however portrayed, lead directly to inequalities among women from all social strata and deepen differences between women's experiences as mothers. Limiting the social functions of the state directly relocates those services back into the sphere of unpaid domestic work. Studies have shown that such changes have an immediate impact on levels

of fertility and this is clearly visible in the statistics for Poland and other post-communist countries (Golinowska, 2002:25). For the vast majority of Polish women the contemporary neoliberal context of Poland is not conducive to family formation: the high unemployment rates, low household income, the perceived unrewarding burden of motherhood, and the growing trend of male and female labour migration to other EU countries all contribute to negative family-related behaviours that have a disintegrating impact on communities and complicate the experience of mothering (Coyle, 2007).

The most important policy alterations affecting maternity in Poland are illustrated in the following table. The changes in policies relating to mothering, numbers of nurseries and kindergartens, and changes in women's fertility and activity rates show the devastating effects of the dramatic 'no alternative way' social policies of the new democracy.

The table illuminates a significant drop in the fertility rate in Poland between 1989 and 2004. In the previous years from 1960 to the 1989 the 30 year drop of 0.95 is insignificant in comparison to the 0.81 fall in the four years between 1989 and 2004. 2004 represents the lowest fertility level in post-war Poland. The effect of the policies of systematic change does not bode well for Poland's future. At some point the government of the time will have to address the population shortage when those children who were born in this period are expected to pay taxes sufficient to maintain the pensions of an elder society. Despite the slight rise in the last few years (since 2006) Poland's fertility rates are still the lowest in the EU. The decreasing trend in women's fertility rates is one of the vital markers for change in legislating parental leave and benefits.⁷¹ A more pressing and immediate problem will be the downturn in women's employment rates. Between the highest figure in the communist era (62 percent in 1970) and the lowest figure after the collapse (46.6 percent in 2006) there is over a 15 percent downward difference in the number of women employed or actively seeking employment (see table below). This is a telling outcome of the institutional restructuring that will again defy a future government looking to utilise an untapped but unskilled labour force to fix problems in the national economic deficit. Despite the maternity leave entitlement being extended (26 weeks in 2001 from 16 weeks in the 1970s), it was the communist social policies of universal parental childcare leave that guaranteed employment after return from leave and the widely available and heavily subsidised schooling and childcare benefits that positively influenced both the fertility figures and the female employment rates of the period. Communism required a stable population and the paternal policies were clearly present to support the ideal state structure. Capitalism and democracy require a high earning population to support any social welfare regime. It appears the current

policies leave half the population uneducated and a shrinking population in the future to support a rapidly developing underclass.

Up until 1968 there was no legislation allowing mothers to stay at home after the end of maternity leave. The lack of adequate policies and economic hardship contributed to the high numbers of women returning to work after having a child (68 percent in 1960) (Kurzynowski, 2000:196). As illustrated in the table below, the policy changes in the following years (in 1972 and 1981), witnessed important shifts in social rights which enabled many women to provide care for their small children for longer and simultaneously allowed them to re-enter the job market once the childcare leave ended. As discussed by Kurzynowski (2000), the data from the communist era (between 1968 and 1988) illustrates a links between mothers' decisions regarding their return to work and their socio-demographic characteristics. Kurzynowski's investigations indicate that the older mothers (aged 30 and more) who had more than one child and who were university graduates continued their professional work more frequently than did the younger mothers with one child and a lower level of education (2000:198).⁷² There was no significant division between the behavioural patterns related to decisions about continuing professional work after maternity leave between the mothers living in the rural and urban areas (ibid). On the contrary, the educational levels were one of the main differentiators between mothers' reasons to return to work: for the women with elementary education the economic aspect was of primary importance, whereas women with higher levels of education valued the work outside home for its intangible advantages of self worth (Kurzynowski, 2000:207). Similarly, the number of children was an important factor in the way mothers perceived their professional work: the more children in the family the lower the importance attached to non-material aspects of work outside the home realm.

**Changes in the state policies regarding motherhood,
numbers of nurseries and kindergartens
and changes in women's fertility and economic activity rates
in Poland in years between 1968 and 2009**

Year	Maternity leave in weeks ^a	Childcare leave in years	Childcare benefit	Number of nurseries in thousands	Number of kindergartens in thousands	Total fertility rate	Women's activity rate in %
1968	12	1 ^b	No	N/A	N/A	1960 - 2.98 1965 - 2.52 1970 - 2.20	1950 - 13 1960 - 42 1970 - 62
1972	16 ^c	3	No	N/A	N/A	2.24	N/A
1981	16	3	Yes ^d	1.5	26.0	2.23	N/A
1989	16 ^c	3	Yes	1.4	25.8	2.03	53.7 ^f
1995	18 ^g	3	Yes	0.7	20.6	1.54	51.1
2000	20	3	Yes	0.6	18.0	1.36	49.2
2001	26 ^h	Available to fathers	Yes	0.6	17.3	1.31	48.8
2002	16 ⁱ	Ditto	Yes	0.5	17.2	1.24	48.0
2004	Ditto	2 ^j	Availability restrictions ^k	0.5	17.2	1.22	47.8
2006	18 ^l	Ditto	Ditto	0.3	17.3	1.26	46.6
2009	20 ^m	Ditto	Ditto	0.4 ⁿ	16.9 ^o	1.39	47.3

^a Maternity benefit paid in 100 percent equivalent of one's income.

^b With children up to 4 years old.

^c 18 weeks with the next child or with multiple births.

^d Income dependant; 50, 75 or 100 percent of the minimal wage; initially introduced for 1 year, extended later on to 3 years.

^e 18 weeks with the next child and 26 with multiple births.

^f In 1992.

^g 20 weeks with the next child and 28 weeks with multiple births.

^h Share of maternity leave between parents introduced: the father could take the up to 10 weeks of the second part of the leave.

ⁱ 18 weeks with the next child. An option for fathers to take 2 weeks from woman's entitlement was also introduced.

^j 36 months with multiple births and 72 month with a disabled child.

^k Available to those entitled to family benefits: paid as a supplement, income per person in a family must be below the social minimum.

^l 20 weeks with the next child, and 28 weeks with multiple births. Only first 14 weeks became obligatory for a woman to take, the rest of her entitlement could be taken by the father of the child. The father must be employed and take care of the child in order to benefit from the leave and financial support.

^m 31 weeks with twins, 33 weeks with triplets, 35 weeks with quadruplets, with 5 and more children 37 weeks

ⁿ Latest data available from GUS for 2008.

^o Ditto.

Sources: Dziennik Ustaw 1946 Nr 6 Poz. 52, 53; 1946 Nr 20 Poz. 135, 136; 1950 Nr 34 Poz. 308, 309; 1964 Nr 9 Poz. 59, 60; 1983 Nr 30 Poz. 143; 1985 Nr 4 Poz. 15; 1986 Nr 42 Poz. 202; 1989 Nr 4 Poz. 21 & Nr 35 Poz. 192; 1991 Nr 104 Poz. 450 & Nr 106 Poz. 457 & Nr 110 Poz. 474; 1995 Nr 16 Poz. 77; 2001 Nr 52 Poz. 538; 2006 Nr 221 Poz. 1615; GUS Reports; Kodeks Pracy art. 180 §1 from 17.12.1974; Kodeks Pracy Dz.VIII from 20.01.2010; Sztanderska-Grotkowska (2009); Kotowska (2009); Kurzynowski (2000).

In post-communist Poland, the political changes at governmental level have always been followed by amendments to the policies regarding social provisions for mothers. This often resulted in the lack of coherence between family and employment policies. Polish sociologist Izabela Desperak (2009b) argues that such inconsistencies at the legislative level come from the fact that the gender debate in Polish politics is reduced to concerns surrounding motherhood and the home realm. For example, the results of the high economic activity of women during the communist era (46 percent of all employed in 1988 – Kurzynowski, 2000:215) amounted to a threat in post transformation Poland to what was seen as the proper development and functioning of the family. The calls for the domestication of women and the revival of conservative and nationalist policies have successfully affected the promotion of traditional family politics but seriously disadvantaged women's rights and social positions in various and uneven ways. The legislative changes have contributed to the stratification of motherhood: the pro-family politics exclude incomplete families and relationships other than marriages (Desperak, 2009b); the abolition of the Alimony Fund⁷³ affects single mothers, while the restraints on access to in-vitro treatments and limitations on marital tax relief reduces the options and benefits of those who choose not to marry.

Further shifts to the experiences of motherhood come undoubtedly from reductions in the state-supported childcare facilities. Almost one third of them have closed since 1989 and this has been particularly damaging in the impoverished areas. Such policies only serve to exacerbate regional discrepancies and further delineate the female social divide. For example, in the school year 2003/2004 there were disproportionately fewer children getting access to the kindergartens in rural areas (16.7 percent) than in large cities (36.2 percent) (Główny Urząd Statystyczny). Only 67 percent of the rural districts in 2006 offered kindergartens and the ratio between available places and children was 1:5, in contrast to the urban equivalent ratio of 1:2 (Kienig, 2006:65). Consequently, only 8 percent of children below the age of 6 living in the rural areas attended kindergartens while in the urban areas the figure was almost 60 percent (ibid). An even bigger problem is caused by the reduction of places providing care for children up to the age of three. The number of nurseries and nursery sections in hospitals has decreased by almost 75 percent since the early eighties. Effectively, there are now only 2 percent of young children (up to three years) who can

receive state care from nurseries (Sztanderska and Grotkowska, 2009:78), compared for example with 10 percent in Hungary (Glass and Fodor, 2007: 337). Unsurprisingly then, the majority of young women who decide to have children also stop working outside the home realm or rely on the help from the older 'babcia' (grandmother) generations (Titkow *et al.*, 2004; Pine, 1998:115; Watson, 2000:378). The young women without children often postpone their decision to become mothers or decide not to have children at all (Hardy, 2009:173).

The magnitude of the problem of unemployment in post-communist Poland has been one of the major impediments to motherhood. Despite legal regulations in place such as job guarantee after maternity leave, additional time off for breastfeeding mothers, supplementary paid care-leave (2 days per year), and special protection from overtime work and business trips, almost all sociological studies report that the fear of unemployment is voiced by the majority of young mothers in Poland (Pietkiewicz, 2009; Klinger, 2009). In 2008, an employment portal Pracuj.pl conducted an online questionnaire to which over 840 parents responded: 62 percent declared that the danger of losing a job after taking maternity leave is a negative factor in their decision to have children. Further 40 percent quoted personal discrimination and a lack of promotion opportunities after their return to work from maternity leave (*ibid*). Yet, these are dilemmas of parents who have been employed before having children. There is a significant group of families (13 percent), usually from small towns and impoverished regions where women's professional mobilisation is very low (Sztanderska and Grotkowska, 2009:79). For them, the experience of having small children is even more challenging: they not only fear subsequent unemployment, if not already struggling with the problem, but they often cannot afford or realistically have no option to use childcare facilities. The welfare reforms meant that the financing of childcare facilities shifted from the state or state-owned enterprises to local authorities. Hence, many of the kindergartens closed in the rural areas where the fortunes of the less developed regions were generally volatile and a smaller number of children fell within the prescribed catchment area. Consequently, few children living in these areas have access to adequate education from very early on. The withdrawal of the state subsidy from these care-sites simply compounds the material inequalities between urban and rural families; it is urban children from families with a middle or above-average level of affluence that make up the highest proportion of children placed in kindergartens (World Bank, 2004).

The combination of church influence, state policies and finance defines the quality of life, functioning of a family, and the way women are able to mother in Poland. It is impoverishment that limits women's chances to control their reproduction. In a situation

where the family's reserves are limited only to cover elementary needs the purchasing of any form of contraception is simply out of reach. It falls to the family because of the deficiency of state support in providing gynaecological care for women. The lack of adequate healthcare and sex education are considered primary reasons for underprivileged women to have more than one child. Specialists dealing with the problem of impoverished families claim that a mother who has many children often does not want to have more but simply does not know about contraception (Tarkowska, 2009b). This is also linked with the strong position of the Catholic Church in Poland and its influential institutional power: its dismissal of any contraceptives (except natural birth-control), its opposition to introducing sex education in schools, and its promotion of a model of womanhood linked exclusively with motherhood and home imposes damaging restrictions and limitations on women's reproductive rights. Essentially, in the areas most affected by poverty, the Church is often the main and the only centre of community life. The local priest, who might well represent the most educated person in the area, is the one who holds the unofficial yet imperative power in the local community. His approval and blessing becomes a sanctioning tool which manipulates the lives of his congregation and often has a constricting influence on women's abilities to control their fertility.

As I have demonstrated throughout, poverty can have a very detrimental impact on the experience of motherhood and it is mothers from rural areas who are most affected by their economically underprivileged position. The findings from the *Małe Dziecko w Polsce (Small Child in Poland) Report* (2006) confirm that the inhabitants of rural villages are often less educated, on a lower income and their access to healthcare services or cultural resources is much more restricted than those living in the larger towns and cities. Children from rural areas are habitually burdened by their parents' low aspirations, skills and knowledge which trap them in the vicious circle of social inequality and poverty (Blumsztajn and Szlendak, 2006:31). In the most extreme situations poverty is also the reason for institutional intervention when a child is placed in a special care establishment. One of the most radical cases of the institutional involvement is illustrated by a recent story of a mother of eight, who after giving birth to her last child was sterilised without her consent and the baby taken away (Szostak, 2009; Żytnicki, 2009). The family's economic situation became the principal marker against her maternal rights. Despite the fact that the children were well-groomed and had good notes at school, the untidiness in the house and her poor living conditions were used to justify the extreme actions taken against her. Her impoverishment defined her capabilities as a mother and the woman's legal rights, her dignity and her sense of self-worth were comprehensively violated. Professor Elżbieta Tarkowska (2009b), who also works with

impoverished families and has studied the problem of poverty in Poland for many years, argues that this is an extreme yet representative example of how poverty stricken people are processed in Poland today. The condescending and paternalistic attitudes towards those who are affected by poverty result from the new Western culture of individualism and the neoliberal precept that everyone is responsible for their own life, their work and their children. The problem of poverty is seen nowadays as a personal failure, stigmatised and marginalised. As recently as the mid-nineties, public opinion was the polar opposite with the main causes of poverty seen as a distressing result of the prevailing circumstances: a recession marked by volatile economic change, massive redundancies and state-provoked social restructuring. A decade later, there was a growing number of those who associated financial struggle with laziness, an unwillingness to work, an endemic recklessness and substance abuse (CBOS).⁷⁴

The introduction of shared entitlement to parental leave should blur some aspects of the stratification of motherhood. However, the credibility of the State Act remains in doubt in the popular recognition and until attitudes change the existing stratifications pertaining to motherhood and the family will remain. Paternal leave is only really economically viable for those families where both partners have similar levels of earnings – and this is rarely the case (Guza, 2010). The aim of introducing an intermediate ‘shared maternity’ leave was a bid to encourage equal opportunities for both women and men in parenting and in their employment. Only the first 14 weeks are obligatory for the mother, the rest she can commute to the father.⁷⁵ In reality, this has been very rarely exercised. Since January 2010 new legislation enables fathers to take an extra week’s paternity leave and from January 2012 that leave will be extended to two weeks.⁷⁶ Fathers taking up the leave are also entitled to maternity benefit. As before, the introduction of this additional leave is intended to promote greater equality between parents but so few know about the new legislation, and those who are aware of their rights fear the loss of their job or position, that again the pundits believe it will rarely be taken up. In January 2010, when the initial legislation was introduced, the take up was indeed disappointing – 75 men used their entitlement (Guza, 2010). The sentiment that still prevails with many employers is that conforming to maternal and paternal leave is a necessary evil. Some labour unions have reported employers actually coercing the parents not to use the entitlement but the reasons are indistinct and the matter is unlikely to flow over into charged public debate (Kruszyński, cited in Guza, 2010). The demographic who are the most likely to lose most are unfortunately the single parents. Maternity or paternity leave is very likely going to be essential in their lives so their apprehension of being dismissed or penalised in any way is disconcerting. The reality is that fear has already led to

this minority group representing those who most frequently do not use the leave (Piwowarska, cited in Guza, 2010).

Changing Images of Motherhood: The 'New Polish Woman'

While the socially underprivileged and economically disadvantaged position is a daily reality of a significant majority of mothers in Poland, a certain category of women seems to be taking advantage of the new opportunities offered by the privatised labour market (Weiner, 2007; Róna-Tas, 1996; Hauser *et al.*, 1993). These women enjoy the advantages of their socio-economic position that allows greater possibilities for self-fulfilment and personal development. The new free market metanarrative is infused with neoliberal discourses and is providing an enduring environment for some individuals to develop personal goals. During communism, educational policies were designed to emphasise vocational training and technical skills to advance the interests of the state rather than to promote gender equality (Daskalova, 2006:152). In line with the models of masculinity and femininity promoted by the communist party, most males were directed into heavy industries and carefully selected females continued in higher education and sought vocations in the less manual professions such as law, medicine and education (Chapter 2). In the new capitalist reality these female vocations offered new prospects and, in contrast to their low pay and low recognition status prevalent in the communist era, they now hold significant prestige and above average pay (Białecki and Heyns, 1993:110-116). In post-communist Poland the socio-economic shifts for women are defined in three layers: the majority have ended up at the bottom of the economic hierarchy, a few make up the middle strata, and a certain small section have been able to reach the top (Weiner, 2007:20). Since 1989 the numbers of private businesses run by women has tripled (to 37 percent of all self owned companies in 2003) while the number of private enterprises run by men has doubled (Geremek and Krzyżanowski, 2003). Although the ratios belie the actual numbers and obscure the starting point from the patriarchally dominated and gender specific cultural landscape, importantly, the upper stratum of women are being increasingly seen as viable participants in the new economy and the trend is rising steadily.

The female beneficiaries of the transformation tend to come from the younger generation. This group is characterised by their urban location, good education and an outlook that endorses self-realisation and professional advancement. These individuals are seen by the economists who assess the transformation as 'masters of their own fate', typical

representations of a capitalist society ascribed to those who trust their own capabilities and skills, who focus on success, activity, and creativity (Stępień, 2001). They are the women who have answered the calls of the market metanarrative (Weiner, 2007). This group stands for different and often contrasting moral codes and behaviour patterns to those who have become downwardly mobile. The upper strata typically present cosmopolitan attitudes questioning traditional values (Giza-Poleszczuk, 2004:265) and therefore this younger generation of women is seen as the one that will change the pattern of cultural life and the cultural picture of Poland (Hofstede, 2000:49-52). According to statistics, a typical representative of this group also confounds convention and lore by being better educated than her male counterparts (in particular more women hold university degrees than men) and, although she typically marries before the age of 24, the trend is towards being a mature mother, which mirrors her stereotype in Western countries (Łaciak, cited in Monkiewicz-Świącicka, 2004; Gatrell, 2005; 2008; Miller, 2005). The average 'new' woman has one child (the lowest number in Europe) and can, and statistically does, take up to 20 weeks of paid maternity leave (Bosacka, 2007; Zastona, 2008). Within this category, 40 percent of women earn more than men and thus hold the symbolic position of 'head of the family' (ibid). Egalitarian attitudes towards gender relations within the work place and the household, the high emphasis on professional career, strong self-awareness and great individualism certainly shape the experiences of these women and form particular attitudes towards the role of motherhood that sets them apart from the more restrained outlook of the impoverished mothers living in rural and neglected areas of the country. It is these upwardly mobile mothers who send their children to kindergartens and strive for a better education for their offspring. Such polarising attitudes and experiences make the discrepancies and inequalities between the mothers in the post-communist Poland a significant social issue.

A qualitative study conducted in 2008 by the Polish Research Centre 'Stratosfera' offers an insight into the attitudes and views of a group of young Polish women. Current and future university students were interviewed on their ideas on the shifting role of motherhood in their lives.⁷⁷ The findings should not be generalised but they offer a good illustration of how some women in Poland are able to voice their opinions from their privileged socio-economic positions. This group has access to higher education and lives in large urban agglomerations where their choices and opportunities are much greater than those from small towns and villages whose prospects are much more circumspect.

The participants of the research by 'Stratosfera' grew up seeing their mothers struggling with both paid work and childcare responsibilities during the communist era. They are the first generation to benefit from the new democratic conditions and their options for 'choice'

have been significantly greater than their mothers'. Embracing the newly emergent possibilities for professional careers, self-investment and self-development, many opt out from the idea of becoming a mother in their early youth or even abandon such plans completely. A body of research on the early transformation period shows that the model most prominent in the mass media and public discourse was that of a successful, intelligent, independent young individual, 'a business person', an identity that was novel and enticing (Łaciak, 1995; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000; Titkow, 2007). This, according to Seibert (2001), is the role model of the 'New Polish Woman'. For the first time the idea of individual choice and the planning of a personal destiny became a viable, and it seems, achievable option for some (Björnberg, 1992:7). Amongst the main findings of the Stratosfera research, however, was also the students' conclusion that Polish motherhood is linked with the idea of sacrifice and a total change in one's life after child birth. So in the final report the younger generations of Polish women assume they will be planning their lives drawing on the knowledge of options rather than traditional expectations. This younger generation seemingly extract only the elements they see as most suitable for their lives, and appropriate them accordingly. This is reflected in the way they evaluate the choices of their mothers from the communist era. On the one hand, similar to the women who mothered in the previous era, they plan to combine education, professional life, and motherhood in their lives and thus still assume the traditional expectations of motherhood as the dual role of a producer-reproducer. Yet, shaped by the neoliberal context of their lives, they distance themselves from the previous generations of mothers in that they see having children as an outcome of maturity and not matrimony (Oechsle and Zoll, 1992).

The younger women are reported to discard the very idea of a patriarchal family and its traditional gendered identities. This is reflected in the way these women speak about constructions of femininities and masculinities – as based on partnership and shared responsibilities, particularly at home. This is also reflected in the shifts being reported in the way men are seen as being more engaged in the family life (Kula, 2005; Zasłona, 2008). As the 'winners' of the transformation, the women do not strive for economic survival but their goal is rather personal development. That is why they want to work professionally—this is their main route to self-fulfilment—being a producer/professional worker is seen as a source of personal autonomy, independence, and fulfilment. The women interviewed by Stratosfera are reported to be focused on financial independence and security. In fact, as highlighted by the research, the way they see a man is the least conservative part of their plan—these younger women no longer expect men to provide for the family as they are perfectly able to do it themselves; rather, men are seen as mere romantic additions to their lives. Finally, the

results of this research indicate that despite the arguments about tendencies for domestication and calls for women to return to the supposedly natural and true representation of femininity linked with motherhood, these younger women are comfortable with the dual role of a producer-reproducer—a theme also identified in the empirical data (see Chapters 5 and 7).

According to Seibert, this 'New Polish Woman' is usually presented as taking advantage of the socio-economic shifts in her country (2001:129). The aspects of control and autonomy are important parts of her identity, which enable her to remain in charge of her private life and professional career. Strength, drive and persistence allow her to reach the goals set and defined by the free market; she usually graduates from university and has a good job. She represents a model of enterprise, efficiency and professionalism. Set within these terms, the younger cohort of my study seems to be embracing this exciting new representation. The novelty of the 'New Polish Woman' highlights the apparent importance of the individual self—the media promote a model of a woman who cannot and should not limit her energies exclusively to the family life, the house, her husband and her children (Łaciak, 1995:234). The novelty then, is illusory, as the models promoted in the previous era also did not approve of women who chose the singular role of a 'mother' or a 'worker'. One of the case studies offered later on in this thesis provides an example of a woman who during the communist era was able to choose (because of her privileged economic situation) to stay at home and care for her three children. She represents a group of mothers for whom the social pressure to fulfil the dual role model of a working mother became a source of discontent and significantly shaped individual life (Chapter 6).

The contemporary media representations again promote a model of a woman who is able to reconcile family duties with work responsibilities. Her 'winner' accomplishment shines through her ability to combine both successfully. Interestingly, the promoted model does not offer a way out of this dual role, instead reproducing the womanhood ideals from the past. Women represented in the Polish press are wives and mothers who have not given up their work interests and focus on bringing together all the demands posed on them. Furthermore, despite being freed from traditional conventions, exemplified through the current greater sexual freedom and more diversified models of family life including the growing popularity of informal forms of living, the promoted models continue to emphasise the importance of motherhood (Łaciak, 1995:236-237). In line with the findings of the 'Stratosfera' research, the younger women's views and expectations depict the possibilities provided by the neoliberal discourses. Yet the importance of motherhood in these women's lives is prompted by the proliferation of the family centred ideals of femininity. Thus, the historically defined

meaning of motherhood, and the evaluation of a woman through the prism of being (or not) a mother continues to shape the public discourse and personal lives of many women in Poland. This is why the contemporary representations of 'appropriate' womanhood persist in demanding that the multiplicity of roles be reconciled, echoing the old concept of the coping mother. In recognising the opportunities, possibilities and assumptions of the market metanarrative, the model of the 'New Polish Woman' still constructs women through their primary role of a mother.

The image of young women presented by the findings of the Stratosfera research demonstrates and emphasises the successful side of the transformation. This group of women that can be seen as more privileged in the post-communist Poland is infinitesimally small, however. Considering the legislative changes, the demands of the market, and the revival of the traditional constructions of womanhood, for the majority of mothers mothering will remain a compelling experience. Looking at the socio-economic contexts shaping the experiences of the various groups of mothers provides a fuller picture of the new reality in Poland. It highlights the dramatic polarisation between women's roles as mothers and, despite the striking disparities between women from different social strata, certain continuities do still persist. The free market economy might have diversified mothers' expectations but cultural myths that underpin the heritage of the nation will continue to shape the lives of the majority of ordinary women. In Poland the ideas and ideals embedded in the concept of the coping mother endure and circumscribe motherhood in certain durable and indefatigable ways.

Conclusions

In this chapter I examined the polarising nature of the transformation and its consequences for women's lives and their roles as mothers. I have also demonstrated the importance and relevance of the path-dependency approach as a theoretical framework, which helps to understand better the heritage of the past, dependencies and links that shape the contemporary contexts of individuals' lives. The emergence of the 'new poverty' and the social 'underclass' has been linked by sociologists with the socio-economic and regional characteristics of those who became downwardly mobile as a result of the transformation. The new reality provided people with supposedly more choice and greater freedom yet left them facing various new problems such as unemployment, poverty and marginalisation, causing rapidly growing distances between various social groups. The catastrophic effect of

unemployment experienced by massive numbers of people who lost often life-long jobs redefined popular subjectivities and changed the experiences of motherhood for many women. During the communist era the maternity leave provisions and the availability of childcare facilities gave women a degree of choice about whether and when to have children, and whether or not to return to their jobs after giving birth. In the democracy after communism that assistance has been withdrawn or significantly reduced, following the changing role of the state, leaving many with new unaddressed dilemmas. Those who were able to engage with the market metanarrative and take advantage of the economic, political and social shifts in the country became the so-called winners of the transformation. Whilst women in general, and mothers in particular, have been located by researchers in the group of the losers, there are clear diversities and divisions between women and their experiences of motherhood as everyday experiences are more nuanced.

Today, the emergence of the image of the 'New Polish Woman' is accompanied by the revival of the myth of Matka Polka, modified and updated. The promulgation of the maternal attributes of Matka Polka by the Church and right wing organisations might yet appeal to the mothers who became disadvantaged through the transformation but the majority are also the least likely to be able to afford her aspirations. In the context of the great social shifts, with some women benefiting and some being disadvantaged in the post-1989 Poland, the image of the 'New Polish Woman' attaches only to those who are able to reap the benefits of the transformation. But the image exists in a broader context and the historical and cultural heritage of specific ideals on womanhood filters through the discourse of this new image. In the next chapters I trace the intergenerational shifts and continuities between two groups of women. These women represent those who seemingly benefited from the transformation and it is the analysis from their narratives that adds to the body of scholarly research of modern Poland. One of the groups is representative of the 'New Polish Women' and this has provided an opportunity to examine the presumptions and claims associated with the choice and freedom offered by the free market. The examination of the women's narrative accounts reveals how the role of motherhood has changed and how some aspects remain doggedly steadfast.

The narrative analysis and the case study research and analysis needs to be set in context, so firstly I set out my methodological framework in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Methodology

*... marginalise what is central.
What is needed ... is tableaux, anecdotes, parables, tales:
mini-narratives with the narrator in them
(Geertz, 1995:65)*

Introduction

The opening quote by Geertz (1995) highlights the importance of a lived experience that, as he notes, could only be gathered through listening to the ‘stories’ of life. The broad context of this research is located within the vast transformations initiated in the late 1980s in Central Eastern Europe, the consequence of which brought down the communist system across all the former Soviet Bloc countries. The intention behind the narrative enquiry of this thesis was to hear the stories of a particular group of mothers, who are more readily identified as the ‘winners’ of the transformation. This focus was taken in order to understand the impact that cultural shifts arising as a consequence of the transformation had on these women’s everyday experiences of mothering. Through listening to their stories, questions are raised about what constitutes the ‘appropriate’ womanhood and how the role and the constructions of motherhood have shifted through political transformation, and how new opportunities are experienced. Furthermore, as Clandinin and Connelly note, ‘as narrative enquirers we work ... not only with our participants but also with ourselves’ (2000:61). Thus, the work has been importantly influenced by my own biography, as were the methods and interpretations in the analytical process of gathering data, understanding a finely focused analysis, and writing up.

The main focus of this research project is to capture the experiences ‘as lived’ through narrative interviewing of two groups of women—one group of women who became mothers during the communist era and one who had their children after the system collapsed. These two cohorts were selected to enable intergenerational comparisons of motherhood experiences. In order to provide the methodological framework for this thesis, this chapter discusses the research methods and techniques used in a narrative approach. The secondary data analysis, visual data, research questions and research design, context, as well as the research encounter, the process of data analysis and ideas of reflexivity are all addressed.

The latter is discussed as a structural feature of contemporary reality but also as a way of 'self-monitoring' (Giddens, 1991).

The Research Process

In the context of the 'contemporary intellectual and political landscape' notions of postmodernity, globalisation and transformations have in different ways shaped the social processes of identity building and significantly influenced studies on identity and selves (Kepny and Jawłowska, 2002; Silverman, 2004; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). It is now well accepted that qualitative research methods are one of the most appropriate ways to gather experiences through periods of change and transition (Miller, 2005). Additionally, when investigating women's lives, it is important to consider the feminist research principle/approach, which emphasises the need to understand the world from the position of the research subject.⁷⁸ It is believed that 'a researcher cannot be neutral, or objective, or detached, from the knowledge and evidence generated' (Mason, 1997:6). Therefore, the researcher's involvement with the subject becomes both necessary and inevitable. Consequently, the idea of reflexivity is one of the characteristics of good qualitative research. The researcher seeks to understand her position in the process of interviewing and tries to analyse afterwards 'how interaction produced that trajectory of talk, how specific versions of reality are co-constructed, [and] how specific identities, discourses and narratives are produced' (Rapley, 2007:16). This is because, as noted by Clandinin and Connelly, 'as enquirers we, too, are part of the parade ... [and] we are not merely objective inquirers ... [as] we are complicit in the world we study' (2000:61).

A qualitative method of research was chosen in order to capture the experiences of two different generations and their experienced the political and economic transformation as mothers. In particular, semi-structured in-depth interviews using a narrative approach would provide a useful tool to study identities and constructions of selves. Robson and Foster, for example, argue about the advantages of the individual interview as a specific research technique, which enables 'the literal and detailed, almost pedestrian level of response [to be] obtained' (1989:55). This is because this type of interview is usually characterised by a 'relatively informal style', and is seen as 'a social encounter where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) accounts or versions of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts' (Mason, 1997:38; Rapley, 2007:16). In such interviews the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress from a prepared interview

schedule and are able to be flexible, interactive and reflexive during the interview situation (Berg, 2004:81). Therefore, using a qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore individual subjective experiences and the meanings individuals give to their actions.⁷⁹ In order to understand and show the context in which the participants' subjective experiences were located I used secondary data (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:10). In gathering the necessary contextual data I used the following sources: the public opinion research centres (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej—CBOS; Taylor Nelson Sofres—The Centre for Public Opinion Research; Ośrodek Badania Opinii Publicznej—TNS OBOP; and Central and Eastern Eurobarometer—CEEB), as well as the main statistical office in Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny—GUS), The World Bank and UNICEF Reports. The information gathered in this way served to provide more general ideas about the structural features of Polish women's lives and helped to place the participants' accounts in a broader socio-economic context. This data was also used in the design of the interview schedule for the in-depth interviews.

The Research Questions

The inspiration for this research came initially from my previous work on Polish women's lives and their attitudes towards mothering and feminism (Awsiekiewicz, 2001). This work showed that many Polish women, mothers and non-mothers, were aware of the fundamental principles advocated by the then newly emerging feminist movement in Poland. Still, almost all those participating in my earlier research placed mothering and the home sphere as the highest priority in their lives. Distancing myself geographically⁸⁰ from what was, hitherto, a taken-for-granted reality for me, I realised that the post-communist condition offered a particularly interesting setting in which to study mothers' lives. Also, my own biography—being of an age that was typically perceived (in Poland) as already 'about time' to have children, and not conforming to that model, I started to ponder on how much of an exception I was in my own country still childless and approaching my thirties. The distance I gained through my geographical relocation offered feelings of not being particularly exceptional amongst my peer group in Oxford. But, back in Poland whenever I visited my family and friends I was aware that public discourses on 'womanhood' in the democracy after communism continued to place motherhood as central. Following the collapse of the communist system, it had been argued that for some groups of young women greater freedoms, more choice and possibilities were now available. These groups have been identified in the sociological literature as the 'winners' of the transformation.⁸¹ Yet, the

persistent pressures on women to take up their 'natural' roles alongside significant changes in the policy framework regarding parenting, offered an intriguing environment in which to think about women's 'choices'. With the legacy of role models of coping heroines from the communist era, and the image of the Westernised woman apparent in the mass media– the options for this group of apparent 'winners' seemed both limited and in some ways consistent with earlier generations of women. Given this changing context I decided to investigate how the lives of two generations of mothers unfolded in the democracy after communism and in order to address the following questions:

- Can the neoliberal promise of success for all be accomplished?
- Has the role of motherhood changed? If so, how?
- What shaped women's experiences as mothers during the communist era and what shapes the lives of these younger women now?
- How do two generations of women experience and narrate motherhood?
- Are these younger mothers able to claim the novel womanhood representations promoted in the mass media?
- How far do traditional models of the 'coping mother' still operate amongst these younger women?

I firstly needed to explore generational shifts around mothers' lives following the political upheaval. I decided to investigate how a particular group of women coming from two generations, who have seemingly gained from the transformation, speak of and understand the changing experiences of motherhood in Poland: the older cohort was to share their retrospectively told stories from the communist era and the younger mothers were to offer accounts of more recent experiences. I wanted to look at what opportunities and possibilities existed across these women's lives, and how these have shaped their accounts. Secondly, I resolved to investigate what is the influence of the neoliberal metanarrative (as articulated in the image of the 'New Polish Woman') on the self-constructions and lived experiences of a group of economically privileged mothers in the post-communist era. To use Berg's (2004:17) expression, by indeed taking 'stock' of myself, my own experiences and biography as a researcher, and as a woman, as well as taking advantage of such a timely socio-historical context I arrived at the idea for this research focus.

The Research Context: Socio-Economic and Regional Details

I collected the data between 2005 and 2006 through in-depth interviews with 24 women, who were all mothers, aged between 26 and 56 years, with college or university levels of education. The majority of the women were employed at the time of the interviews and all lived in cities. This sample was selected purposively and conveniently from two areas of Poland through snowballing techniques, starting with my own social contacts already held in the regions (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1992). Following the research objectives the selection of participants was focused on finding participants who would fit within one of the two groups—the older generation of women, the mothers of the communist era, and the younger generation, the mothers of the post-communist era. The older mothers were aged between 43 and 56 years (at the time of the interview), who all had their children between the years 1971 and 1995, so their children were aged between 35 and 11 years old at the time of the interview. The younger mothers were born during communism (between 1971 and 1980) and entered adulthood in newly democratic Poland. Many of them had vivid memories of the communist times because they were between 9 and 18 years old when the system had collapsed. Thus, their recollections of their mothers, older sisters, or even grandmothers often served as a reference point in their intergenerational comparisons. The women were aged between 26 and 35 years at the time of interview, and all had their children between 1994 and 2006, so their children were between 3 months and 12 years old at the time of the interview.

The focus on two cohorts of women of different generations, rather than treating them as one, was preconditioned by the research aims—the changing role of motherhood throughout a period of systemic political and social shifts. I decided that it was important to gather data not only from women who became mothers in the new democratic era, but also to have accounts from women who became mothers during the communist period. This enabled me to compare and contrast women's experiences in order to be able to 'capture' shifts and continuities. As a result, 13 women from the older generation and 11 from the younger generation were interviewed. In order to protect the identity of those who took part, pseudonyms have been given to all participants. The sample characteristics including participants' age at the time of the interview, education and occupation, the numbers and ages of children, time spent on maternity leave, and partnership status can be found in Appendix 1. All of the participants were white, heterosexual and lived in Poland. At the time of the interview all but 2 women (one from each generation) were in a full-time employment, and all except for 1 (from the older generation) were living with the fathers of

their children. At the time of the interview 3 women (all from the older generation) were the sole family providers as their husbands had been unemployed for a number of years.

The interview process commenced with pilot interviews conducted with friends who then also served as gatekeepers. Following that, the gatekeepers' social contacts were used to recruit the sample for the study. The gatekeepers were given an information sheet and a leaflet explaining the project which they could give to potential participants. They were also briefed on good practices relating to this, and all necessary steps were taken to ensure that all the participants were recruited voluntarily. Using gatekeepers enabled a diverse group of women to be accessed and the collection of a wide variety of accounts and experiences to be gathered. The interviews took place on most occasions in the participants' homes, and in a few cases in a public place such as a café or a work-place canteen. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and three hours. The interviews were conducted in Polish, (digitally) recorded with the participants' permission, and later translated to English following initial transcription into Polish. The sample was not recruited in order to produce generalisable findings, but rather in order to explore (through in-depth interviewing) these women's individual experiences.

In the Polish context locality is understood in more fixed ways than in other countries where being born in a particular place does not impede one's mobility. As Seibert demonstrated through her research, the links between geographic position and the shape of Polish women's lives mean that people are often 'tied down to where they live' (2001:186). The regional segmentation of the country reflects the uneven socio-economic divide between the economically more prosperous (the so-called Poland A) and the poorer parts of Poland (the so-called Poland B), which have historical roots. The transformation processes have reinforced further the separation between the more developed regions with large urban agglomerations attracting foreign investment, and the eastern regions of Poland B, which are weighted with ineffective farming, where previously the state's holdings and agrarian cooperatives were mainly concentrated and where the defense industry played a major role (Kozak, 2005:148). The participants in my study all lived in areas that belong to Poland A: the city of Warszawa located in Voivodeship Mazowieckie, and Szczecin and Kołobrzeg in Voivodeship Zachodniopomorskie. Consequently, their lives were shaped by their locality in a way that offered greater choice and opportunities than for the women and mothers who resided in the more agrarian parts of the country known as Poland B. The lack of adequate infrastructure, capital affiliations or production facilities reinforce existing regional discrepancies as the more prosperous and better equipped regions of the country are supported by the political elites (Jarosz, 2005:22). This is illuminated for example through

The illustration on page 107 and
appendix 3 pages 240-242
have been excluded at the request
of the University

collection (2002-2004), months with the highest unemployment in the reach of over 20 percent were recorded, and this finds its reflection in the views voiced by some of the women interviewed.

According to the last national census (from 2002)⁸³ conducted before my data collection, the highest employment rates were noted in Voivodeship Mazowieckie (48.1 percent) and Wielkopolskie (46.3 percent), both located in strategic central parts of the country with large urban settlement: Warszawa (Voivodeship Mazowieckie) and Poznań (Voivodeship Wielkopolskie) as their socio-economic cores (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2003:46-47). The lowest employment was registered in Warmińsko-Mazurskie (39.6 percent), Lubuskie (39.9 percent), Dolnośląskie and Zachodniopomorskie (each 40.3 percent) (ibid). But, the most dramatic inequalities have been recorded between towns and villages. This is especially the case when considering the discrepancies against large agglomerations with the rural regions where the differences can be very striking: the most telling example is the Mazowieckie Voivodeship where the sub-regional disparities equal 1:5 - which means that the employment rates are 5 times lower in the rural areas than in the city of Warszawa (Kozak, 2005:151). Thus, while for the Voivodeship Zachodniopomorskie on the whole the employment rate was one of the lowest, for Kołobrzeg where I interviewed some of the participants, the unemployment rate was lower than the national average.⁸⁴ The high levels of unemployment present in the more disadvantages areas had dramatic consequences for many individual lives affecting whole families: this is also reflected through the fear and uncertainty about the future voiced in the narrative accounts offered by the group of women interviewed for this project (see Chapter 5).

Research Design - Interviewing Using a Narrative Approach

Interviewing has been defined as a 'conversation with a purpose' to gather information and is a way to recount people's experiences. But recent developments in qualitative research call for a more 'reflexive' and 'performative' approach towards interviewing (Berg, 2004:75; Mason, 1997:40). There is also an expectation that gathering data through interviewing can produce a 'vehicle' for generating fundamental knowledge about selves and society (Denzin, 2001:24). In examining people's experiences, their narratives should be listened to as they are not only 'ways of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life', but more importantly, personal narratives are a means by which identities may be fashioned or claimed and/or constructed (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992:1; Riessman, 1993:2).

Clandinin and Connelly argue that the use of narrative inquiry for qualitative researchers can be justified by the very fact that our life is 'filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities' (2000:17-18). Thus, the exploration of individual narratives is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) also argue that the narrative practice lies at the 'heart' of constructions of selves and is a form of 'interpretive practice'. This encompasses the very act of storytelling, the resources needed and the social world present (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000:104). Yet, reviewing the relevant literature makes it clear that there are many ways to conceptualise 'narrative,' and the field of narrative studies is 'multivocal, cross disciplinary, and extremely diverse theoretically and methodologically', which is often seen as its strength (Riessman, 2008:151). A formal definition of a narrative put forward by Lewis Hinchman and Sandra Hinchman is as follows: 'discourses with a clear sequential order that connects events in a meaningful way for a definite audience ... [offering] insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it' (1997:xvi). Riessman calls those elements listed by Hinchman and Hinchman as the 'distinctive features' of a narrative, adding to them 'contingency,' which, she notes, requires a narrator to construct an order (often called plot) from random happenings in a longer turn at talk (2008:81). The multilevel and interdisciplinary positioning of narrative research means that 'any attempt to simplify its complexity would not do justice to the richness of approaches, theoretical understandings and unexpected findings that it has to offer' (Squire *et al.*, 2008:12). There is, however, at least in some of the work on narrative research, an agreement on seeing it as spoken (first person) stories of experiences with some sequential order and temporal element, going beyond description, and being more than a theoretical representation (Riessman, 2008; Squire *et al.*, 2008).

In this study I use the term 'narrative' in that I ask participants to reflect on their experiences as mothers during a particular period of significant political change and social transformation. The interview produces and invites a 'temporal' element in the structure, the 'and then' element of temporal ordering as the participants are invited to reflect on previous times to locate their experiences and 'make sense' of them (Salmon and Riessman, 2008). My work is informed by Miller's (2005) research on women as mothers, but unlike hers, it is not longitudinal. In my research project a focus on 'making sense' through inviting participants to reflect on a period of political, socio-economic and cultural shifts, invites reflection and captures the fluidity and complexity of individual life experiences.

The accounts gathered are then 'narratives' because the participants are seen to be 'doing' work within them, ordering events to make sense of their lives in changing circumstances. In

the interview this involved them narrating their experiences to produce 'coherent' or 'recognisable' accounts. Lois McNay offers a relevant definition, which encapsulates my theoretical position towards narrative:

The act of self-narration is central to identity formation; experience is *organised* along the *temporal* dimension, in the form of a *plot* that gathers events together into a *coherent* and *meaningful* structure which, in turn, gives significance to the overall configuration that is the person (2000:81, emphasis added)

An interview with a narrative approach can be described as an interview designed to focus on a subtle 'elicitation and provocation of storytelling' (Wengraf, 2001:111). This design typically starts from a single initial narrative question, which in my research was: 'I wonder if you could begin by telling about your life since leaving school'. One of the main aims of such approach is, as Riessman put it, 'to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives' (1993:2). The narrative approach presupposes then that individuals make sense of their lives by organising their stories in time (McAdams, 1997:30). Yet, although I decided to take a narrative approach with my interviews, I kept the focus on 'special topics' that were the centre of the research questions. This approach is known as a 'request for partial biographical narrative' (Wengraf, 2001:121).

All participants were briefed on the aims of the project before they took the decision to consent and join to project. This was done through a leaflet that I prepared containing a short outline of the research. The leaflet was distributed by the gatekeepers to the potential participants. Then, those who were willing to participate in the interview contacted the gatekeeper. If a participant agreed to be interviewed a meeting was set up. Thus, at the time when the interview took place the participants had some knowledge of my interests. Still, before each interview officially started I firstly spoke with each participant about the research (i.e. that I am interested in their experiences of motherhood and life through the transformation period to the current time). The women were invited to talk about their lives but with a primary focus on the main interests. Indeed, with some interviews, I had to only use the opening 'warm-up' question with the participants' answers covering all the provisionally prepared prompt questions. In such situations, since the respondents were not interrupted with 'standardised questions,' they often told long stories. This, in a way, gave participants a possibility to control, at a certain level, the interview. In some other interviews, I had to follow up on each answer working closely with my questions (see Appendix 2).⁸⁵

As I have argued so far, the temporal dimension is a pivotal element in narratives around which individual experiences are organised (McNay, 2000:81). Through narration individuals attempt to make sense of their experiences by ordering them in time even though this might not be a chronological ordering. 'Temporality' is then a key term in narrative (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). There are two important aspects to it: the fact that the experience is temporal, and also, that life is experienced on a continuum, which is also embedded within larger (meta-) narratives. This was reflected in my interviews. The market metanarrative and the idea of the coping mother provided important frameworks within which the women, in narrating their experiences as mothers positioned their personal narratives. Our day-by-day experiences are thus contextualised within a larger context, and the meaning of the people that we study, the meaning that we as researchers give to the objects and subjects of our study will change as time passes; it is something 'in passing' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:19). For example, through the greatest part of this research project, looking at the shifting experiences of motherhood, I was approaching the study and the participants from a personal standpoint as a childless woman. This had shaped aspects of my work; for instance, when some participants confronted me on this matter my disclosure in certain ways influenced their responses. Had I been a mother at that time, I may have collected different data or been positioned by my participants differently, being 'one of them', and so more subjectively experienced in the topic that I was trying to investigate. This is not to say that the actual data that was obtained affects its validity; rather that the changing context shapes importantly the meanings that we attach to objects and subjects of our experiences.

Molly Andrews (2008) notes that the interpretations of our data are forever changing, and thus researchers should revisit their data. Andrews argues that the transcriptions of interviews represent certain choices that the researcher has made, which are only 'valid' for that particular time when this was done. This is because, she claims, they are 'provisional' and are made by subjects that are positioned in a certain time and a certain context that might well alter over time, highlighting the temporal aspect of individual lives (Andrews, 2008:86). Although people's lives may appear static, they are in fact, as noted by Clandinin and Connelly, a 'shifting, moving, interacting complexity' (2000:125). Thus, it is vital for a researcher to revisit and reread the data when analysing and finally writing the research text in order to 'figure out' once again what one is studying. The ever changing context of the researcher's life and the complexity of the field may not be the same phenomenon that 'figured so clearly in the proposal' at the outset of the research (ibid). The changing contexts in which I was producing this thesis urged further rereading and revisiting of the data. This

has enabled me to clarify my case and augment important discussions that supplement the overall argument significantly. Andrews refers to the vantage point from which to view phenomena as vital in understanding the complexities of the topics investigated (2008:87). It was through that vantage point, or what Riessman calls the 'thrice told tale' (2004:321), that I was able to see for example that although not always voiced, the ideas and values embedded in the concept I have subsequently phrased as the 'coping mother' were repeatedly woven through the narratives produced by the participants in this study. This theoretical aspect underlies the importance of rereading and revisiting of the data throughout the entire process of analysing the data and writing the research text.

As I have argued so far, the analysis of narratives must be located in a broader context that acknowledges other larger narratives within which the personal narratives are located, as they can be both enabling and constraining for individuals (McNay, 2000:23). Narrative construction does not take place in isolation, the narratives are 'disciplined by the diverse social circumstances and practices that produce them' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000:3). Thus, despite the seemingly endless possibilities of choice that individuals seem to have in the late-modern context, the narrative construction of selves is always conditioned 'by working sense of what we should be at particular times and places' (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000:3). The production of a narrative should be seen as both actively constructed and locally constrained, as this reveals the relationship between structure and agency. This theoretically important aspect permeated the analysis of the data, as it has shaped the ways I have approached the stories told by the participants – bearing in mind the social circumstances and practices of a particular time, in which the women have lived and experienced (and continue to experience) motherhood. This has provided an invaluable point of reference in understanding the particular narratives produced by women in the two generations in my study.

The Research Encounter

The research encounter is an important social interaction. A current and dominant trend in methodology calls for the 'non-neutral or reflexive' interviewing (Seale *et al.*, 2007; Collins, 1998; Oakley, 1981). The issues of rapport in the narrative approach are closely connected with reciprocity to the extent of 'disclosing some aspects of [interviewer's] self' in order to make interviewees 'feel more at ease' (Rapley, 2007:21-23). If this is to be reached, Ackroyd and Hughes suggest that a 'suitably relaxed and encouraging relationship' needs to

be established during the interview situation and interviewer must communicate 'trust, reassurance and even, likeableness' (cited in Rapley, 2007:19).

Clandinin and Connelly, have argued about the impossibility of remaining silent in the interview encounter; 'it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as [a] researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealised, inquiring, moralising self' (2000:62). Working with a narrative approach and being a reflexive inquirer poses certain tensions and dilemmas to studying the participants, which must be carefully considered throughout the entire process of inquiry. The matter of reflexivity continues to attract various opinions. On the one hand, the necessity to understand the lives' as told by the participants calls for the researcher's involvement in the experiences examined (Mauthner, 2000; Harrison and Lyon, 1993). On the other hand, some scholars voice a concern that becoming fully involved the researcher 'takes the same things for granted, adopts the same standpoints, and has the same practical intentions as participant', which results in the 'objectivity' being lost (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:81). The concept of researcher's objectivity is highly contestable, especially in gender studies take on the standpoint theory when one cannot pretend to be objective but comes from somewhere and has an agenda. My own experiences, what Nancy Scheper-Hughes calls 'the cultural self', as a woman, have had an influence on how I approached the data, the interviews, and the analysis (1992:28). There are certain 'tactics' such as 'slipping in and out' – allowing intimacy while being in the field and slipping out of intimacy when composing and reading texts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:82) – or a 'controlled self-disclosure' (Mauthner, 2000:299), which may help the researcher to feel comfortable enough to find a 'middle ground' between distancing and self-disclosure during the interview situation. Throughout the process of interviewing I found myself in a position when I had to use some of those techniques, and only with time did I manage to find a comfortable middle ground.

Throughout the process of interviewing, the women from the older generation seemed more willing to elaborate in detail on their experiences, occasionally even sharing intimate aspects of their lives. In such situations I found myself feeling ambiguous; on one hand, I felt pleased with being able to create an atmosphere in which a participant felt comfortable to disclose such information, on the other hand, however, I felt a bit uneasy with an unexpected level of openness (Birch and Miller, 2000). Many women in the older generation, who were of my mother's age, often behaved towards me in a 'motherly' way, telling me in detail their life stories, wanting to share their life experiences, almost as if 'conveying' their knowledge as mothers to their 'daughter'. (This might have, however, also limited their stories in some ways.) On one occasion a woman even made sure, checking repeatedly throughout the

interview that the voice recorder was working, that our conversation would be 'caught' properly. With the younger women the interview situation felt more relaxed and was more like a girlfriends' chat, when they tried to share with me experiences I had not yet had, especially in relation to their own experiences of motherhood. On almost all occasions, when I met women in their houses, I experienced typical Polish hospitality,⁸⁶ to the point where people would drive me back to the place where I was staying or walk me to the bus stop, especially after dusk.

In lots of ways my questions prompted the participants to think in ways they may not previously have done. This was visible in the way some of the women 'paused' searching for words: 'I don't know how to describe ... what words to use ... I haven't spoken like that for such a long time' (Irena, 53). This is not unusual in research focused on life stories and as noted by Robson and Foster, 'most people are not used to the one-to-one interview situation and their thoughts and opinions are not collected together in an orderly manner' (1989:53). Another aspect highlighted by Maria Lara that came through in my study, relates to the emancipatory dimension that the interview experience might offer to the participants (1998:3). Many early feminist studies demonstrated how linguistic forms can exclude women.⁸⁷ Marjorie DeVault (1990), for example has argued that talk and interactions are highly gendered, with the terms 'public' and 'private' largely circumscribing meanings behind them.⁸⁸ West and Zimmerman (1983) also found that women's speech often is treated as trivial, especially in interactions with men. Such positioning of women's voices illustrates the effects of power relations between women and men but also illuminates the obstacles for women to speak 'fully and truthfully' according to DeVault (1990:98). Traditionally, women are often seen as a 'muted group' despite their often important roles as transmitters of the language through their care and teaching of children (Ardener, cited in DeVault, 1990:98). Some feminist linguistic researchers argue then that language should be seen not only as oppressive, but also as a potential source of power (Spender, 1985, MacKinnon, 1983). This is especially relevant in woman-to-woman talk, as women speakers are seen by these linguistic researchers as often more likely to listen in a way that brings their interactions with the participants into the point of constructing the meanings together. This being said, I recognise that the understanding and familiar comfort that the situations of women interviewing women can offer are not guaranteed by gender alone. The complexities of women's lives, their various positioning and life contexts highlight the potential conflict and messiness of talking and listening together between women (see e.g. hooks, 1981; Riessman, 1987; Collins, 1989). Still, in my attempts to create a space for the participants, through the interview situation, I was often able to gather accounts rooted in the realities of their lives.

The experience of being interviewed can result in positive feelings for the participant as previous research has shown (Birch and Miller, 2000). During the interviews some women confided that they did not have many opportunities to talk about their own lives in the way the interview had let them do. They tried to explain that the fact of not having many occasions to talk about themselves and their lives meant that at times it took a while to respond to my questions, something that Riessman (2008) refers to as the 'narrative contingency'. Many women made sure at the end of the session that their interview would be of use to me, and they often seemed to undervalue their accounts by calling them 'prattle,' 'jabbering,' 'chit-chat':

I'm not sure whether you would be able to make use of my prattle
(Helena, 35).

I hope that the rubbish I talked would be of a use for you (Ryta, 55).

Well, I hope my account will be useful for you (Kinga, 49).

I just would like to wish you all the best and I hope this [interview] works
out for you (Jadwiga, 56).

As I have noted earlier, an important aspect commented upon by some participants related to the fact that at the time of the interviews I did not have my own children. The image of 'involved' researcher that I was trying to present at times came almost as a disappointment to some of them as they found I did not share being a mother with them. When being confronted on a few occasions about this, I realised that for some it was a surprise or even disappointment, as if almost by revealing this information I was less trustworthy. The women who were stay-at-home mothers, especially, seemed to be making an additional effort to convince me about the positive aspects of being a mother and devoting one's life to that cause. To counter these reactions I explained that I planned to have children and one day to become a mother. I felt that my non-mother status influenced the ways in which some participants talked to me. This clearly illustrates the complexities of maintaining and negotiating the boundaries between the researcher and the participant.

On three occasions women asked to be interviewed together with their friends, and on one occasion a husband, who was present at home with the three children of the couple, intended to stay in the room during the interview. Only after I explained that I would be asking the participant to talk about her mothering experiences, did the man, with reluctance leave the room. Although it is not always possible to achieve, Robson and Foster argue that individual interviews should not be conducted in the presence of any other person, as it is not possible to anticipate the impact of that presence on the participant (1989:52).

The potential emotional and/or psychological impact of the interview experience became apparent to me whilst doing this research. Although I resisted the therapist role during my interviews, in the sense that I refrained from giving feedback, my role was often more than a silent mediator, as I found myself in situations of dealing with very intimate and often unexpected disclosures (Birch and Miller, 2000). As in Mauthner's (2000) research on discourses of sistering, many of my interviews were emotionally charged and at times I felt that some women used the interviews as therapeutic occasions. Painful disclosures included: a woman reflecting in tears on the drama of transporting the body of her stillborn baby between towns during the curfew in the communist era; a woman recollecting her experiences as a young mother with an abusive ex-husband and a woman painfully disclosing her feelings of rejection by one of her daughters. These examples illuminate the potential impact of prompted reflexivity—and not knowing what will emerge—and expose the complexities of narrative interviewing and dealing with, often very private material. Further intricacies of narrative research transpired for example in the analysis where I faced the issue of demonstrating the intricacies and inconsistencies of particular narratives. This has offered an opportunity to illuminate complexities of individual case studies, but also positioned questions of how do I tell the story and respect personal disclosures without objectifying participants with whom I formed a trusting relationship that enabled me to gather such data.

The importance of ethical standards being maintained throughout the entire process of any research is a prerequisite in qualitative research (Berg, 2004; Birch and Miller, 2000; Mauthner, 2000). In line with the university requirements I sought ethics approval for my research and obtained it prior to the beginning of data collection. The research was at all times carried out in accordance with the required ethical standards and good practice.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data starts at the time when the interviews are conducted—in making journal notes, writing debriefing reports after each interview, and continuous 'narrative thinking' in the search for the patterns, threads, tensions, and themes (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). During the process of data analysis I began by exploring how the individuals narrated their experiences and how these narratives were shaped, produced and (re)worked. I then explored the differences between the two generations, and how these shaped the narratives produced by the participants.

All the interviews were recorded with participants' permission. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed; I undertook all the transcribing. The need for the transcription to be followed up closely by the translation of the accounts, from Polish to English, only enhanced the repeated listening to the accounts and my immersion in the data. The analysis in qualitative research is always a flexible and fluid process without clear boundaries (Arksey and Knight, 1999:161; Perry, 2000:104; Basit, 2003:143). In order to lose as little as possible of the subjective experience of the interview encounter I wrote debriefing notes after each interview, kept a journal, and simultaneously made notes while doing the transcription. These additional research tools became invaluable resources during the data analysis (Wengraf, 2001:222).

As a first step in the data analysis and as a way of organising the data I undertook the process of coding (Basit, 2003). By reading the text with the research questions in mind I marked the relevant 'subsections' or 'subtexts'. This is usually followed by defining the major 'content categories' or 'coding categories' and sorting material into those categories (Mauthner, 2000:291). These coding categories were developed from the theoretical concepts of the study and included the following: motherhood before and after the communism's collapse, transformation, work within and outside the home realm, gender relations within the home sphere, how practices of agency are demonstrated and reflexivity articulated. The process of moving from a field text to a research text once again highlights the complexities of narrative inquiry. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discuss, there are some vital components of analysis which have been central to how my data analysis was conducted. These important elements of the data analysis include: the initial reading and consequent rereading, organising interview text into a 'chronicled and summarised' accounts, coding, identifying story lines that 'interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear' (2000:131). The idea of revisiting data can bring an outcome of a narrative inquiry which leads to multiple valid interpretations and multiple narrative 'truths' (Squire, 2008; Freeman, 2003).

I am fully aware of the limitations which can be levelled at narrative and qualitative research (Silverman, 2000; Rice and Ezzy, 1999). The interview situation captures only a particular story that is recorded and transcribed into text, and as Wengraf put it 'it is not only the person one has become that speaks when life history is being narrated, but also the person one would like to be' (2001:117). This may result in interviewees approaching the past in a form of 'selective reconstruction' when only experiences that do not challenge the identity that the participant wishes to claim at present time are chosen (Riessman, 1993:64). As

noted by Holstein and Gubrium, 'narrators artfully pick and choose from what is experientially available to articulate their lives and experiences' (2000:103). The accounts collected almost certainly will be influenced also by the context of the interview, the interaction, atmosphere and relationship between the interviewer and interviewee; this rapport shapes the substance and the meaning of the stories told. Since researchers are selective in what may appear as an objectively presented account of an interview (recording), the research text is in fact interpretive, by researcher and participant, and contextualised, by the specific circumstances of the interview's origins and settings (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:94). This has been accounted for throughout the process of data analysis and recognised as a limitation to the claims made in this thesis.

Despite its usefulness and efficacy, the concept of narrative has been central to much of the critique with claims that narrative is a determinist tool that reproduces a masculinist view of the world (e.g. Plummer, 1995). As I have argued earlier, this relates to the notions of language and talk contributing to the subordination of women. Individuals learn to interpret their experiences in terms of dominant language and meanings (DeVault, 1990). The market metanarrative, which has been an important influence on the personal narratives produced by the participants of this research, is a dominant hegemonic discourse. Similarly, the discourses on what constitutes 'appropriate' womanhood employed in the post-1989 Poland (to exact on women reproductive behaviours linked exclusively with their maternal roles) have also served as a manipulative tool in the hands of the powerful institution of the Catholic Church. Thus, in the analysis of the narrative accounts gathered, I acknowledge the masculinist power embedded in grand narratives that then have shaped the women accounts. However I also recognise and appreciate the fact that the interview situation had offered my participants an opportunity to operationalise agency in producing their accounts within the various contexts shaping their lives.

Analysis and 'Key Narratives'

According to Plummer (2001) one of the most crucial elements of analysis in narrative research is to identify the key themes as they are the primary step in organising data. The 'key narratives' that I identified in the data are linked with the metanarratives that are culturally conditioned and that had shaped the kinds of personal narratives that the women from both generations were able to produce: the market metanarrative and the concept of the coping mother. Ann Phoenix also advocates the idea that constructing identities takes place

through such 'key narratives', as the key themes identified in the initial stages of data analysis 'cluster around recurrent content in stories' (2008:67). Thus, if a certain subject matter seems to be recurrent and persistent in a narrative, it could probably be identified as a key theme. In the data gathered for this project, the key themes were centred on certain practices (like 'coping' or 'managing'). The key themes are usually important for participants and are developed as a consequence of significant events or developments in their lives (Boenisch-Brednich cited in Phoenix, 2008:67). Throughout the interview process, as Phoenix put it, 'participants may construct themselves as having particular philosophies and habitual ways of dealing with the world that constitute the project of identity' (2008:67). The older generation of women interviewed for this project were indeed presenting themselves as 'heroic coping mothers' of the communist era by drawing upon 'particular philosophies' in producing key narratives (Phoenix, 2008). These philosophies were structured around key themes including 'coping,' 'managing,' 'devotion,' and 'pride'. Similarly, the younger cohort presented themselves as young mothers in the post-communist period by producing narratives that were, not surprisingly, different to those produced by 'their mothers' generation. Their narratives were informed more clearly through ideas of 'individuality,' 'autonomy,' and 'control'. These key narratives are then 'repeatedly told and can be reinvented as the life narrative is revoked' (Phoenix, 2008:67). Women from both generations had utilised the key narratives specific for their age group, drawing on the larger narratives available to them. The mothers of the communist era employed the themes that defined the communist version of the coping mother: the heroic working mother dually burdened, yet proud to be able to cope with everything alone. The mothers of the post-communist era utilised the market metanarrative to present themselves as mature, responsible individuals and 'modern mothers'.

The Case Study Method

As a further level of analysing and making decisions about how to present the data, it was decided to employ a case study approach (Yin, 2003; Gillham, 2000; Basit, 2003). This approach offers an opportunity to illuminate the multifaceted and intricate aspects of the individual narratives that underlie their uniqueness. As my aim was not to produce generalisable results but to present exclusive insights into individual lived experiences, this method of analysis proved to be particularly suitable. By selecting and presenting the specific key narratives as case studies, I was able to demonstrate realities of a day-to-day experience of the presumed beneficiaries of the post-communist transformation as narrated

by the chosen participants. The detailed examination of these selected narratives provides a telling picture of how the changing contexts of mothers' lives can influence their understandings of specific meanings (linked with what these women understood as 'proper'/'appropriate' motherhood) that turn out to be both shifting but also continuous.

The case study method offers a comprehensive and multi-layered analysis that provides a valuable opportunity to explain complex causal links in real-life and to describe the actual life contexts better than other methods. This is due to the distinctly in-depth level of analysis employed in an examination of a single and unique instance, which simultaneously also illuminates some of the aspects of the wider population to which it belongs (Yin, 2003; Basit, 2003:146). A case can be of an individual, a group, an institution or a large-scale community, or multiple of these (Gillham, 2000:1). In my research, case studies were made of four individual mothers. The case study method also acts to support the understanding of complex issues and adds strength to the analysis obtained from another research. The idea of added strength is a key characteristic of case study research, as no one kind of source of evidence is likely to be sufficiently valid (Gillham, 2000:2). In my research, the case studies have been a consequential step from the analysis of the narratives in their full complexity when I looked for patterns and relationships between the two generations. I have selected the individual case studies, two from each generation, as they offer an opportunity to capture uniqueness of personal narratives, but also they enabled me to demonstrate some collective elements of experience. According to Gillham, a case study can be understood as 'a unit of human activity embedded in the real world; which can only be studied or understood in context; which exists in the here and now; and that merges in with its context so that precise boundaries are difficult to draw' (2000:1). Through this method of data analysis I was able to draw more clearly detailed accounts of individual life-contexts demonstrating how these women's experience were products of but also embedded in these shifting contexts.

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information, but direct or participant observation, archival records or various types of documents such as letters, memoranda, study reports can all serve as a base for the case study. In my investigation, I used the in-depth interviews with a narrative approach as the sources for the case studies. Yin (2003) recommends that in order to embark on the case study method a researcher must have the following skills: the ability to ask questions and to interpret the responses, be a good listener, and be adaptive and flexible so as to react to various situations. My decision to employ the case study method was informed by these recommendations.

Tellis (1997) argues that the multi-perspectival analysis available in the case study method offers an opportunity to acknowledge not only voice and perspective of the participant but also of the relevant group that the participant belongs to. For example, in the sociological analyses of the homeless and powerless many studies present the discussion from the viewpoint of the 'elite' (Tellis, 1997). Giving voice to these powerless and voiceless is possible through the case study. Analysis of a narrative account in its full complexity as a case offers a deeper understanding of what people think and feel, and how and why they act the way they do. Such analytical method allows for presentation of internal shifts and contradictions within a particular narrative and they in turn allow for complexities to emerge and be addressed.

One of the main limitations of this approach is usually the small number, which critics of this method believe offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings. Another limitation noted is that the results of such data analysis cannot be applicable in real life (Tellis, 1997). Yet, for the case study researcher all evidence is of some value (trustworthiness) (Gillham, 2000:10). Thus, while I recognise the limits of such a small number of cases used in my research, the detailed level of analysis allowed by this method has enabled me to produce results which offer unique insights into individual lived experiences that are located in the real-life context in which these mothers operate.

Validity

One of the main characteristics of a personal narrative is its undeniable uniqueness.⁸⁹ A story is told by a person in their own way. This distinctiveness of narrative gives the researcher an opportunity to hear the story of a participant's life and so gather invaluable data, but it also raises questions of 'trustworthiness' of the data (Riessman, 1993:66). Therefore, the validity of gathered accounts must not be ignored, and be an important consideration in data analysis. Catherine Kohler Riessman argues that this can be achieved through several different ways: either by 'persuasiveness', which requires the interpretation of the data to be reasonable and convincing; by 'coherence' where a constant revisiting of initial ideas about interviewees' aims and motivation for the account, as well as the structure and content of the story is conducted; or by directing the study and its outcomes towards a pragmatic use where it becomes a foundation for others' work (1993:68). 'Correspondence' is also a common practice, where credibility is sought by presenting the results of the study to those studied.

Once the analysis and interpretations are confirmed by those giving the initial accounts, the credibility of the research is relatively higher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Riessman, 1993).

After completion of the initial research project I prepared a synopsis of findings which will be offered to those who indicated an interest in receiving it. But, in the analysis of personal narratives the attention has also been drawn by scholars to the notion of 'validity'. The Personal Narratives Group highlights that in talking about their lives individuals do not reveal the past 'as it actually was' but they still offer 'the truths of [their] experiences . . . revealed from real positions in the world, through lived experience in social relationships, in the context of passionate beliefs and partisan strands' (1989:261-263). Similarly, Miller advocates that researchers instead of seeking objectivity should recognise and appreciate 'authenticity' in the accounts they gathered (Miller, 2000; 2005). Narrative and most qualitative research has 'internal validity' because it deals with collecting individuals' subjective meanings about their own experiences.

Similarly to Gail Perry's (2000) experiences with unstructured interviews, my assessment of reliability and validity is based on a number of factors. The fact that many of the participants said more or less the same things (although in somewhat different style and vocabulary) has been one of the important aspects to take into account when considering the issues of reliability. For example, the notions attached to the concepts of 'appropriate' womanhood and/or motherhood were replicated by many women from both cohorts. Interestingly, some of the attributes associated with the ideas and ideals of Polish motherhood (such as coping with the double-burden of mothering and paid work) were similar not only among women from the same generation but the resemblance was also apparent across generations. Furthermore, the participants also identified common elements of the relationship between the new post-communist reality and the demands of the labour market (carried by the discourses of the market metanarrative). The study has thus provided data that can be considered reliable and the results make sense in relation to existing discussions on women's lives in the post-communist era (e.g. Hašková, 2007; Titkow, 2007; Seibert, 2001; Watson, 1993b; Ladó, 1991). The results can be integrated, for example, with theories on the social consequences of the transformation on women's lives as mothers.

As the data analysis exposes, selves are tenuous but they are also coherent, and data collection and interpretation are always complex undertakings. As a qualitative researcher I take the narrative accounts offered by my participants as authentic accounts of their experiences and views located within a particular moment of the interview situation. I believe that this study adds to existing knowledge and carries that knowledge forward by

adding a qualitative in-depth dimension which contributes to better understandings of the day-to-day realities of gendered lives in post-communism amongst a specific group of mothers that represent the presumed beneficiaries of the post-communist transformation.

Using Visual Data

In the interviews I also included visual images produced during communist times in order to add a point of reference for participants in constructing their narratives. Analysis of their implicit ideological and cultural messages became a part of the research methodology. I knew that the data existed (the visual images in the form of propaganda posters, newspapers photographs, and personal pictures representing the reality of communist life), and therefore decided to link and incorporate some of them into the interviews (see Appendix 3). Mason notes that 'visual data may provide a way of gaining access to ... a set of events or processes, which you cannot observe ... (because they have already occurred)' (2002:108). This was especially relevant when interviewing the older generation of women who were asked to reflect back during the interview over two decades. The usefulness of what has been called 'photo-elicitation' during interviews has also been noted by Schwartz (1998). This is because it can prompt 'extensive verbal commentary which may not be otherwise forthcoming during the interview process' (Emmison, 2004:246). Photographs are seen then as memory triggers that can help in the recollection of previous experience. The images provided a base around which some of the narratives were produced as photographs are a rich source of our memories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:114).

I used visual images during the interviews by asking women to comment on a set of photographs with an expectation that their answers would provide another facet to my investigation (Mason, 1996). The photographs included: a picture of empty shelves in a butcher's shop, a queue for toilet paper, a ration coupon for meat, a popular baby's product from the time, and a communist propaganda poster of a woman on a tractor (see Appendix 3). Applying this additional method into my research proved to be helpful and often served as 'entertainment' during the interview situation. The women talked about the pictures willingly, and with much distance, which allowed them to discuss the often 'bare' facts of communist reality visible in the pictures in a humorous way. On a few occasions some women shared with me similar pictures from their own personal collections, and one woman even gave me a real ration coupon that she had preserved for herself as a memoir of those times. Notably, the ration coupon was from August 1989, which is a date when all the strikes

in the Polish Port of Gdańsk escalated to result in a victorious overthrowing of the system, making the coupon one of the last that was produced. This act suggests engagement in the research endeavour. She must have believed that with me this record of the communist reality could serve my research purposes in ways it could not if left lying in the bottom of her kitchen drawer. I found such displays of people's engagement in my project to be real 'treasures' of doing narrative inquiry.

Outline of the Data Analysis Chapters and Rationale for Selection of Cases

The following three empirical chapters provide an in-depth account of dominant themes arising in the data and for analytical and theoretical purposes are organised around an inquiry aimed at examining the changing role of motherhood in the contexts of the post-communist transformation and a discussion about the influence of the neoliberal metanarrative with its invocations of self-reliance, competitiveness, autonomy, and personal responsibility (as ingrained in the workings of the free market) on the self-narrations and lived experiences of a group of mothers living in the post-communist era.

In Chapter 5 I examine the changing role of motherhood in Poland. Narrative accounts of women as mothers from both generations, the older mothers of the communist era and the younger mothers of the post-communist era, are compared and contrasted. Participants' accounts of transformation and experiences of motherhood are explored through the political, economic, social and cultural shifts and different time-frames. This intergenerational comparison provides rich analytical material, which exposes not only views on what constitutes good motherhood in each period, but also offers an excellent example of how the participants evaluate the social and political transformations. The findings illustrate the contradictory views of women from each generation with regard to their experiences of being mothers in each era. For the older cohort, being a mother is narrated as being easier during the communist era, despite their awareness of the limitations and restrictions linked with living under the communist regime. State support and secure employment were seen by the older mothers as significant advantages of this times. In contrast, the younger mothers regarded their mothering experiences as being much easier today because of conveniences, such as, baby food or disposable nappies. They also acknowledged the growing engagement of men in supporting women in their roles as mothers and home carers. Interestingly and significantly each generation assessed the other as being more disadvantaged. For the older women the 'wild capitalism' and instability of

the labour market, high unemployment levels, and the 'rat race' were all seen as detrimental to women's lives and experiences as mothers. The younger cohort, on the other hand, argued that the (historical) absence of the father (as recollected through their own childhood reflections), scarcity of consumer goods and the general hard economic conditions during the communist times made mothering experience much more difficult than in contemporary Poland. This comparative analysis offers an opportunity to demonstrate how context produces meaning in relation to women's understandings of their roles as mothers, wives and workers. The chapter also examines the ways in which the concept of the coping mother is invoked in these women's narratives of motherhood, particularly through the symbolic images of Matka Polka brought up by the great majority of interviewees. I illustrate the ways in which the women, by voluntarily bringing up and commenting on the powerful cultural archetype, drew upon the ideas and ideals embedded in their understandings of the myth of Matka Polka.

In Chapters 6 and 7 I present empirical data on further changes to the role of motherhood through case studies. Each of these chapters takes as its cases two mothers from each generation. Despite the limitations of this approach discussed earlier, this way of presenting data offers a significant level of detail to be illuminated. Through their focus on power relations within the family and home sphere they all offer an opportunity to trace continuities and changes in women's gendered lives. Chapter 6 examines accounts gathered from the older cohort discussing as case studies the data arising from interviews with Aniela and Aleksandra. Aniela (54), an architect re-trained to work as a hygiene consultant and laboratory analyst because of the transformation, is a mother of two and lived in Szczecin. Aleksandra (48), a mother of three, trained as an accountant and became a full-time mother after having her first child; she also lived with her family in Szczecin. In Chapter 7 the case study approach is used to focus upon two younger mothers: Kasia and Magda. Kasia (32), like Aleksandra, is a full-time mother with three daughters, and she has been selected as case because of her contrasting narrative compared to Aleksandra. Kasia from the younger cohort and Aleksandra from the older cohort were the only two mothers amongst 24 who did not work outside of the home. Magda (30) was a university graduate with a relatively secured job at managerial level in one of the international banks in Warsaw, and she was a mother to one boy.

The market metanarrative is dominant in some women's narratives (Chapters 5-7). But ultimately the data shows that it is the younger cohort that is more in a position to draw upon the identity of the 'New Polish Woman'. In my discussion, I illuminate how the prospects opened by capitalism have offered the younger mothers opportunities to present themselves

in ways that indicate shifts in understandings of the role of motherhood in Poland. Constructions of 'New Polish Woman' are evident in the younger women's claims to individuality and autonomy, and in descriptions of their more egalitarian relationships with their husbands/partners. Fathers too are described as bigger involvement in family life and childcare. I argue, however, that this seemingly novel representation of the 'New Polish Woman' still contains obdurate elements of 'proper' womanhood and the 'good mother' which have been historically and culturally conditioned. Despite the passage of time, significant political, social, cultural and religious changes and experiences of emancipation for some younger women and mothers it is often the dominant construction of the coping mother that continues to shape women's lives in the contemporary Poland.

Conclusions

This chapter has set out in detail the research approach undertaken in this study. I note that a researcher must remain continually reflexive when gathering, assessing and analysing narrative data. Similarly, the coherence of a research project can only be ascertained retrospectively as the process is often a 'messy business' (Miller, 2000:59). Yet, of greatest value to the project remains the fact that being able to gather personal narratives I was given the chance to capture peoples' real experiences. This is because 'stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world' simultaneously shaping and constructing the narrator's personality and reality (Lieblich *et al.* 1998:7). I believe that taking a narrative approach allowed me to create a 'research text' that illuminates the experiences not only of and for the mothers, but also of the larger narrative of the social and theoretical context which contributed to and shaped the personal narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Finally, this approach allowed me to better understand how the power of culturally conditioned ideals on womanhood is narratively exposed, embodied in individuals, and expressed in practice.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis: The Changing Role of Motherhood in Poland

Introduction

Poland's population is in decline. For any future government to be effective it needs a healthy active taxable work force. Since 1945 there has been an overall fall in birth rates and a general decline in total population, as the elderly are not being replaced by either children or immigrants. The country's fertility rate over the past five years is on average 1.27 children per mother. As the statistically accepted world population stability ratio anticipates two children per woman, investigating the effects of transformation and the social and political shifts on motherhood in Poland is relevant. This chapter looks at the various features that have affected motherhood since 1945 and at the onset of the communist state. It looks at women's experiences as mothers, which might illuminate some of the reasons behind the dramatic 10 percent fall in the fertility rate in 2005 (data from Główny Urząd Statystyczny). The context for the four case studies which follow will also be used to demonstrate the intergenerational differences and commonalities and offer an in-depth analysis, which exposes complexities of individual lives.

More than the 45 years of communism, the impact of the 1989 transformation has had a complex effect on the Polish women. No single event or feature can be taken in isolation because of the cyclical character of cultural change influencing the financial markets, which in turn has reflected back onto the cultural landscape. Under such a destabilising environment the decline in fertility rates is perhaps not surprising, but through a focus on the women's narratives in this study it can be shown that despite some clearly claimed shifts in the life contexts of the younger cohort there is a continuity that provided these women with a dominant point of reference.

The parameters covered here are as wide and diverse as the period they relate to and include: the sense of local identity, the sense of belonging, migration and geography, the structural and institutional changes and their implications for social mobility and class formation (Seibert, 2001; Kovács and Váradi, 2000; Domański, 2001), as well as broader phenomena such as the definitions of femininities and gender relations, the economy, the dichotomy of 'winners/losers', employment or the lack of it, myth and the rewriting of myth. They all

determine complex interactions between events and the effects they have on the ideals/thinking of womanhood.

The qualitative and narrative approach taken here is one based on first hand interviews and case study analysis. This chapter then adds to the body of work on women's experiences of motherhood, work, change and identities. The case studies presented later are unique in terms of any other previously available data source and are presented as such to add to the historical record for others to investigate. As a focus point, the chapter discusses the influence of communist and post-communist regimes on mothers. There is commonality and intergenerational differences of course but the contrast between the available literature (see Chapter 3) and the insights and diversity afforded by the interviews, adds significantly to understandings of how gender, agency and power operate in the two different eras.

Setting the Context

The women who participated in this research had certain common characteristics that distinguished them as a select group: they all lived in large towns or big cities, had at least college-level education, and most of them were in paid employment at the time of the interviews. This has importantly defined their socio-economic localities positioning them as the 'privileged' recipients of the post-communist transformation. Consequently, their experiences will be shaped by this relatively privileged position and their accounts of the particular lived experience of post-communism. In practice, however, and in spite of their positions, the participants of this study can still be seen as experiencing gender inequalities, both in the workplace and at home, and apparent differences and diversities surfaced amongst them.

The fact that the participants lived in urban areas considerably facilitated their employment opportunities. Amongst 24 participants, 9 came from Warszawa, 6 from Szczecin, and 9 lived in Kołobrzeg. Warszawa, the capital and the largest city of Poland, located in the central Poland is one of the main commercial centres in Central Europe. With over 1.7 million inhabitants, the city is the ninth largest city in the European Union by population. Its cultural, educational and economic life attracts not only large numbers of tourists but makes the city a Mecca for the growing numbers of migrants from other parts of the country. With the largest university and one of the lowest unemployment rates in Poland, Warszawa is home to a highly skilled workforce. Szczecin, located in the north-western part of Poland, is the country's seventh-largest city with the largest seaport in Poland. It has three shipyards,

of which the biggest one, Stocznia Szczecińska, was the historical place of the 1989 workers' strikes. The city's economy relies on the production of food, construction materials, brewing, the pharmaceutical industry and several companies in the IT sector. With over 400,000 inhabitants it is the capital city of the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship. With several higher education and science establishments, numerous museums, arts and entertainment sites the city offers relatively high levels of cultural and professional opportunities. While both cities, Szczecin and Warszawa, are amongst the biggest urban agglomerations in the country, Kołobrzeg, a seaside resort with its nearly 45,000 inhabitants is a smaller settlement. Located in the northern part of Poland, its unique location makes it a popular health resort for local and foreign tourists who visit the city for its microclimate. With recent EU funding the city is experiencing a period of dynamic development, which puts it at the forefront of many rankings published by newspapers like *Rzeczpospolita* or *Forbes*.⁹⁰ With the unemployment rate lower than the regional average, the city's main industries, fishing and tourism, are reportedly offering enough jobs to adequately meet the needs of the local residents.⁹¹

Clearly, locality, particularly if it is a large urban area such as Warszawa or Szczecin with relatively good educational and work opportunities, will in most cases mean that these women gained advantages from the specific conditions prevailing in these cities that have benefited from the transformation of 1989. In contrast to women living in more disadvantaged areas, as a group, women from larger cities have benefited more from the changes of 1989. Whilst regional economic circumstances have exerted a significant influence on the lives and expectations of these women, historically shaped social conditions and values (associated with the ideas and ideal of the 'appropriate' Polish womanhood) have also played an important part in determining the manner in which these women have responded to the changes of 1989 (see also Seibert, 2001).

One further and important factor that shapes the trajectory of women's lives and views is their social class. Some of the younger participants interpret the post-communist environment almost exclusively through the empowering promises of the market metanarrative: in terms of new professional and educational opportunities, greater freedom and choice, and economic values. Cultural shifts were also noted as the outcomes of the transformation: the postponement of motherhood, the prioritisation of higher education and economic independence. These attitudes reflect trends found in Western societies where self investment has become more of a feature.⁹² Those women who are the beneficiaries of the systemic shifts and their specific position in the social structure generally refer to the consequences of the transformation as positive in every respect. But not all the younger

women shared these visions and despite their apparently more privileged positions, they produced accounts threaded with criticisms of the post-1989 condition. These narratives were characterised by uncertainty and fear about their family's economic situation and security of employment. These concerns became apparent when the women were asked to compare their own situation as mothers with that of the women from the older generation who had raised their families predominately during the communist period. In praising the employment security offered by the system in the previous era, the younger mothers believed that being a mother was in this respect easier back then than it was for them today. The views of the older generation on the outcomes of the transformation were more diverse and most of the women recognised the more difficult consequences of the shifts following the communist era. The narratives of the older cohort could in part be explained by the fact that as reported in the literature, age is often one of the determinants in one's position on the labour market and hence their experiences in the post-communist Poland are more varied than for the younger women (Weiner, 2007, Titkow, 2007). In evaluating the situation of the young mothers today against the settings in which they have mothered, the older cohort also assessed the communist times as much more favourable for having children (making clear references to the welfare provisions offered). This affirmation further contributed to the less positive assessments of the capitalist economic relations.

The Mothers of the Communist Era

In order to illustrate how the representations of motherhood from the communist era shaped the lives of the women participating in this project I now focus on the ways in which the women from the older generation narrated their experiences of being mothers during the communist period. This involves an examination of women's accounts regarding the circumstances of becoming a mother, the work in and outside the home realm, and relationships with their male partners.

Almost all of the thirteen older participants had their children during the communist period, with four women having their next children shortly after the collapse of communism. All women were in full-time employment, except for one who had been a stay-at-home mother since 1984. Only two of the women took six months maternity leave, with all the other women staying on the state supported maternity benefits from one up to three years. This is in contrast to the younger generation of women, who at the time of having their children (between years 1994-2006) could only receive state support for up to four months after the

birth of each child. All the older women were married, except for one who was divorced and at the time of the interview was living with a new partner. There are many similarities amongst this older group of women, in particular in relation to their experiences as working mothers during the communist era. As noted by Elaine Weiner, the scripts of women's lives prior to 1989 in many Soviet Bloc countries yield a common plot because of the socialist states' revolutionary ideas about gender and class (2007:24). But there are still many differences and diversities between women's personal lives and this cohort represents a relatively diversified group: the women's vocational qualifications varied from a cook in a kindergarten to a university professor; they lived in large or middle-size cities but many grew up in rural areas and came from large families. The women had various family situations in their adult lives: some still had their grown up children living with them, some had to be the sole family supporters as their husbands were affected by unemployment, some suffered the loss of their children, and some had to deal with their husbands' substance addiction. All these circumstances have shaped the lives of these women, their experiences as mothers, and the narratives that they have produced. It must also be noted that the narrative accounts produced by these women were constructed retrospectively, as they were reflecting back on their lives in the previous era. Most research accounts are retrospective, but this group was being asked to reflect over a longer period. This has important implications for the types of accounts produced, which was taken into account when examining the interview data.

When discussing their experiences of becoming mothers almost all of the older participants located themselves within traditionally defined ideas of womanhood: motherhood was seen as something 'natural' and etched into female destiny. None of the women spoke about getting pregnant as something that was planned or thought through. Jadwiga, an office worker in a transport company in her late fifties, stated that:

... they both were *unplanned* [pregnancies], honestly [laughs], I *didn't even know* that I was pregnant... I was *shocked*, really shocked... No, we didn't use any contraceptives. It was spontaneous [laughs], but we were careful, you know, but I was still in *shock* ... I mean ... you know ... well... anyway, *none of them was planned*. With the first one I was in a real *shock*, sort of, at least at the beginning. I wasn't prepared for that ... With the second one ... I also didn't know ... I was sure I couldn't be pregnant because my husband was on a business trip, and when he came home I was just before my period, and we 'were together' but, you know it was the time of the month, which I thought was safe ... but I was pregnant again.

For the majority of women, like for Jadwiga, the pregnancies were something that 'just happened', and the women spoke about 'being in shock' when they discovered they were pregnant. The women have positioned themselves as mothers in rather unflattering frames—

becoming a mother was something almost accidental and although many of them spoke about being unprepared; they welcomed all their pregnancies as innate, natural episodes in their lives, highlighting their biological constitution as a central determinant in their destinies. According to the official communist policies at the time women were provided with easy access to contraceptives and legalised abortion, but in reality aspects of control were not relevant for these women. Becoming a mother was seen as a natural sequence of events after finishing school and getting married. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the communist state's policies, public discourse and societal expectations circumscribed the demands of the maternal work in specific ways. The life scripts of individuals were more regulated during the communist era and the social actions were shaped by the notions of duty towards the collectively defined state. This was nowhere more apparent than when examining the ways the older cohort engaged with the dominant representations of womanhood of the time. For almost all of them the model of the working mother stood as the norm. Importantly, the fact that the demands to assume the dual role were endorsed by the structural support certainly provided these women with a sense of security and comfort. Thus, in their narratives what came to the forefront was a relatively relaxed approach towards the concept of having children. Unlike the younger cohort, for whom becoming a mother was shaped by the ideas of control, maturity and careful planning, the older mothers appeared to be handing over their reproductive lives to the 'natural' course of events.

While these women's lives during the communist era were shaped by pressures to 'reproduce the nation', their identities and bodies were subject also to other various influences, one of the largest being the Catholic Church. The ways in which this powerful, in Poland, institution circumscribed women's decisions on motherhood becomes particularly visible when considering women's religious views. The great majority declared themselves as Catholics and voiced very firm opinions about abortion. For example Krystyna, a 53 years old mother of four, stated that an abortion for her was 'absolutely out of the question'. Religious undertones could also be sensed in the way some women spoke about being a woman: the views were deeply rooted in biological determinism and only through becoming a mother was the woman seen as fulfilled and happy. An excerpt from Elwira's account, a mother of three working as a civil servant, exemplifies how femininity was conflated with being a mother, a discourse central to the Church's ideals of womanhood and present in many narratives of the older cohort:

A woman is created to have a baby ... only when you have a baby ... then there is this sense of fullness and happiness for a woman ... I always associate a woman with a mother. For me a woman is most importantly a mother.

The women of the communist era were then instrumentalised as mothers by different political, societal and cultural powers. Their lives and bodies were regulated by the state and the Church for the national and religious interests. These women thus could be seen as the agents of social reproduction—an unintended unification of the state's and Church's interests in subordinating women (Ferree, 1995). The notions of individual choice, self-fulfilment or autonomy were not very significant during the communist era. These women's lives and individual agency were heavily influenced by the social constructions of motherhood of the time. Their ability to be active agents were disciplined by the then contexts of material and social forces but they also, in their narratives, can be seen as active in negotiating the hegemonic demands imposed on them (McNay, 2000:16). In line with the prevailing and dominant expectations, the women became doubly-burdened, yet their opportunities to operationalise the agency were visible for example in the ways they almost enthusiastically narrated their ability to cope with the harsh reality of the communist era, which provided them with pride and a sense of accomplishment. This offered them an opportunity to demonstrate themselves as strong and capable women rather than seeing what they were experiencing as an expression of inequality. The following extracts illustrate the importance of demonstrating an ability to cope:

When I was pregnant I had to cook, and clean, and do all the other stuff. I washed 40-60 nappies every day before I went to work at 7am. I got up at 5am to cook and clean and prepare the kids for kindergarten and later on to school, and before I left the house everything was done. My husband was working in another city, I had four children, and I had to *cope* with everything by myself; wash children clothes and nappies, cook the food, bathe them all, well, I was going to bed at 1am. But, I *managed*. (Krystyna)

At that time all the Saturdays were normal working days, and I had two small children at the kindergarten, and I *managed* somehow to do everything. I was even taking up some extra work to do at home, in the evening when children were asleep. I would work few extra hours to earn the additional money ... I never complained; it gave me lots of satisfaction. (Jadwiga)

I returned to work and my daughter went to a nursery ... and then after couple of years I got pregnant again ... and my husband was working away in another city, and so I had to stay alone ... with two children, without the washing machine and other conveniences. I had to boil the nappies in a big boiler, it was a nightmare ... I was 25 years old then, but I *managed* everything myself, and I was also doing very well at my work. (Elwira)

Despite the fact that not many of them could realistically be independent financially, as there were often two salaries required to support a family, the women often stressed the value of having their own financial resources. This had further positive consequences, as for many, the economic production had significant psychological implications in terms of self-esteem. The ability to contribute to the family unit on a par with men was voiced on many occasions.

Historically, the demands for women to be self-reliant and responsible for the existence of the family during the partitions, reinforced by communist policies, clearly contributed to the creation of the accepted role model of the working mother. The women's apparent willingness to work professionally and the recognition of the importance of such work could also be seen as some evidence of gender equality created by the system. Even though they were not aware of 'gender equality' at that time, or indeed concerned with it, when interviewed some of the women were able to interpret their experiences through contemporary lens. For example, Antonia, a university professor from Warsaw and a mother of three said that

there was a positive outcome [of communism], one positive aspect of it all ... that Polish women always worked, were always in paid employment ... this model of an *active mother* ... of a woman who works and having children doesn't stop her from doing so ... all of us, my friends, we all had lives like that.

All the women saw the duality of their roles as something 'natural' and 'obvious'. In positioning themselves as coping mothers-workers the women actively validated their capabilities to perform within the double-burden, which ultimately only perpetuates the idea that it is 'natural' and 'instinctive' for women to do the 'second shift' (Hochschild, 1989). This exemplifies a common theme in the accounts of the older cohort, which reflects and engages with discussions in the wider literature on women's lives during communism as importantly determined by their dual roles.⁹³

Economic production formed then an important part of the women's narratives. In line with the communist propaganda many indeed prided themselves on being able to contribute to both productive and reproductive labour, despite the fact that the equality offered by the communist system operated mainly as rhetoric. Notwithstanding the women's claims about the inequality and rigid labour market segmentation, for almost all of them paid work outside the home sphere was central in the way they constructed their identities as working mothers. Paid work was seen as a source of financial independence and appreciation. The importance of the idea of economic self-sufficiency came to the fore in many accounts. For example, Krystyna, quoted earlier, a working mother of four said that

For a woman it's crucial to work outside the home, to have her own money. Every woman should have her own things, something that is just hers ... we have things together, we are a family, but at the end of the day I have my own resources.

Being an active participant in economic production was an important element in the interviewees' lives. For example, most of the women described returning to work after having a child as something 'natural' for them and this had further repercussions for the way

the women negatively assessed the stay-at-home mothers. In considering the mothers who did not work outside the home as 'without any interests of their own' (Antonia), 'dependant on a husband' (Ryta) or 'socially withdrawn' (Aniela), the work related accounts of many participants illuminated the importance of paid work for their constructions of 'proper' womanhood. Being 'just' a mother did not count as something socially worthy. This way the women also reinforced the socialist policies on female emancipation as legitimate only through production both within and outside of the private sphere (see Chapter 2). The older women associated the fact that they worked with financial independence and autonomy, yet equally it was through paid work that these women felt they were recognised and received appreciation. The following extracts illustrate these themes:

I always felt better, it boosted my self-esteem, and I felt more *appreciated* ... paid work was always giving me lots of energy for other things, for example to work at home in the afternoon. (Jadwiga)

... [by going to work] you can change your homely routine, because at home, everyone knows how it is – cleaning, washing, cooking ... and when you work, you just have to leave it all and go out ... and there [at work] you have the feelings that you can ... be *appreciated*. (Elwira)

... you can just walk away, close the house door behind you, forget about everything, and just devote yourself to work ... and ... in a way you already *accomplish something*. No one is expecting you to make food, to put the potatoes on, do the washing or cleaning, and so on. (Irena)

Clearly, production at home did not count in the same way as work outside the home realm. Significantly, these women did not see their extensive work burden as an outcome of power relations in their patriarchal society. As studies show, many women under communism did not consider their hard work and exhaustion as gender oppression; rather, this was associated with the oppressive nature of the state (Watson, 2000). As I have argued in Chapter 2, the dictatorial character of the communist government reinforced the divide between the society and the state shifting the boundaries of the private/public spheres. This had important consequences for the ways the gendered identities were constructed and practiced, as well as the fact that they seemingly elevated the meaning of the home and women's role within that realm. But the problem of housework 'not socially counted as work' has long been at the centre of feminist discussions.⁹⁴ On the one hand then one can detect conformity in these participants' accounts with the very idea of being responsible for 'the work at home in the afternoon' (Jadwiga) because 'everyone knows how it is' (Elwira) – the woman is expected to 'make the food ... do the washing or cleaning' (Irena). Yet, on the other hand, in acknowledging the advantages of the work outside the home realm, these women actually identified their work at home as undervalued. This was done silently because none voiced

their dissatisfaction or revolted against it. So, whilst some muted their frustration, many found 'psychological gratification' in the fact that they coped with having everything on their shoulders (Titkow, 1998:26).

When discussing the gendered arrangements in their households, the older women visibly positioned their constructions of femininity and masculinity during the communist era (not surprisingly) within the patriarchal framework. In sharing their views on a typical man's role in a family some participants presented at times very personal accounts of family life based upon clear inequalities. The men were referred to as the 'heads of the family' regulating the finances and taking the main family decisions. They were described as controlling, dominating and decisive, whilst the women were occupied taking care of running the house and caring for children. The following excerpts by Kazimiera living in Warsaw, and Alicja and Jadwiga, both from Kołobrzeg, offer good examples of how many of the older women narrated their gendered experiences within the home:

A man, in terms of his role, has that desire to *dominate*, to *control* ... my husband was very *decisive* about our children's education ... maybe sometimes about our holiday destination ... and maybe also about the ways the money was spent ... but whether that's the family model or it's just in our family, I can't say ... but what is rather bizarre for me—that some marriages today keep financial independence ... how do they decide what to pay for together and what to pay for separately ... I don't know ... in our house we have joined finance, which are *controlled* mainly by my husband. (Kazimiera)

The truth is that *the responsibility was on me*, I was taking care of them mostly ... it was *mainly on my shoulders*, that's for sure, *in everything* ... when I was on maternity leave with both boys, my husband would come back home from work, and nothing would interest him anymore. He even, couldn't be bothered to go for a walk with children, with us. (Alicja)

In my house I always, it's always me ... I mean my husband would do the Hoovering sometimes, when I ask him to do that ... but *it has never been done properly*, just the middle of the room, you know...again sometimes he does the washing up, only once in a blue moon and really superficially, but the rest: cooking is my job, washing is my job, cleaning, ironing, everything. (Jadwiga)

Significantly, both spouses were in a full-time employment, which meant that the women were doubly-burdened because of their responsibilities within the home sphere. Many participants, like Jadwiga, justified this situation claiming that it was only they who could do the work at home properly, thus positioning themselves as those competent in performing the housework. This had strong implications for the way the women located men in their narratives, they were background figures, blurred and in the view of the women unaware of the women's actual daily hardship. In part, such constructions of men's positions within the home realm were caused by women's perceptions of themselves as possessing 'better' capacities to do the housework. This enabled the women to claim the unofficial position of

the 'family manager', who cares not only for the house and children but also tends to her husband (Walczewka, 2000). Claiming this unofficial position of authority within the home sphere offered the women a form of empowerment (see the case study of Aniela in Chapter 6). Such findings mirror discussions in the broader literature (Chapter 2). Consequently, ideas on gender 'equality' (as propagated by the communist party) can be seen as empty rhetoric, which in reality only reinforced the patriarchal definitions of gendered identities.⁹⁵

The 'structural and material contexts' of these women's lives did not prompt or facilitate reflexivity as might be understood in contemporary Western societies, whilst they lived their gendered lives during the communist era (Miller, 2005:140-141). For them, being a woman was equated with becoming a mother, and this took place within biologically determined frames, without much personal debate for preference or relevance or apparent reflection. These mothers' lives were driven by the necessity to meet the demands of paid work alongside the social acceptability in the way they performed their maternal work (Ruddick, 1989). In communist Poland this meant combining reproduction with production. Retrospectively, in order to make sense of their double-burden, they presented themselves as strong, capable women for whom any amount of responsibilities, even in the context of the harsh reality of communism, did not pose too much trouble. Being able to mother and run the house alongside full-time employment formed a major part of their narratives. The women spoke with pride about their capacities to cope, and the idea of self-sacrifice was woven through many of their accounts. They did not question the inequality they possibly experienced at home; rather, they reflexively portrayed their family dynamics as centred on their roles of coping 'superwomen'. This moved men into the background of their busy lives and offered the women an opportunity to justify their selflessness and ability to be powerful players in some respects in this domain. In producing what I call 'heroine narratives' (although for them their actions were not out of the ordinary), the older women demonstrated how they were conforming with the ideology of the working mother as propagated by the communist regime.

The Mothers of the Post-Communist Era

In this section I turn to examine the ways in which the younger cohort narrated their experiences as mothers and motherhood. I argue here that these women's views as well as practices have shifted through systemic changes when compared with the older generation and have been clearly informed by the new context of post-communism, democracy,

capitalism and neoliberal discourses. I demonstrate these shifts by exposing differences in the ways their narrations on pregnancies, children, professional work and relations with their partners appear to be constructed and narrated in ways which overlap with representations of the 'New Polish Woman' found in work of Anita Seibert (2001). The findings of my study demonstrate how the women's constructions of selves in relation to motherhood and paid work are both different and in other respects similar to the experiences of the older generation.

All the women in this younger cohort became mothers after the communist system collapsed. They are of the same generation as the daughters of the older cohort, and were all in full-time employment, except for one who had been a stay-at-home mother for 12 years, at the time of the interview. One of the women had a three-month-old baby and was on state funded maternity leave. All of the other women were employed in a range of areas: office workers in an international supermarket chain, managers in a bank, a college teacher, a beautician, and an architect. All the participants but two (who lived in cohabiting relationships) were married. All the husbands/partners of the interviewed women were in full-time employment, except for the father of a three-month-old baby who was completing his university degree and working in part-time jobs. Like the older cohort, all the younger women lived in middle and large-size cities, and all had at least college-level education. In contrast to the older women in the study, the experiences narrated by these younger women were much more recent. This is important to consider when analysing their accounts, as it is likely it will significantly influence the type of narratives provided.

In the data collected from this younger cohort, experiences of becoming a mother centre on aspects of control, management and order. Across the narratives the decision whether to become a mother was carefully planned and anticipated. The participants often expressed feelings about their maturity and being responsible enough to have a child. This in turn gave these participants a sense of being in charge of their lives, and as being more independent than the older generation. Iza, an administrative employee in a large chain supermarket and a mother of one, argued that:

... women become mothers much, much later than before ... mothering these days is more *mature, planned, expected, awaited, looked forward to* ... our mothers ... we have to admit that they were much younger than we ... when I look at myself, that time when *I was waiting to become a mother, I had lots of time to think about that and to plan it*, and I think it is much more *mature and responsible experience* for me. Mothering these days is just much different; many women become mothers later in their lives.

Unlike the older generation, the younger women have narrated the experience of becoming a mother as a managed event—aspects of control are clearly voiced, and in their narratives practices of reflexivity and agency around which their accounts are produced are apparent. The participants spoke about responsibility linked closely with the way the women prioritised their lives and individuality associated with the ability to decide for themselves. They also highlighted the importance of establishing levels of independence before having a child, such as a good level of education and/or a good job. As these participants often spoke about having a life before becoming a mother, a child was a carefully considered addition to their lives. With their careers established, the participants tried to fit in having a child (children) into their already existing professional lives, without necessarily placing a child at its centre. Being in control of their reproductive lives meant that the women regulated when and how many children to have. This stood in contrast to how the older women narrated their experiences of becoming mothers; for them the aspects of control were less relevant and the ability to determine their reproductive lives less possible. Most of the younger participants became first-time mothers much later than the women from the older generation echoing changing trends in reproductive practices across Western Europe: 85 percent of the older generation became mothers before the age of 26 years, whereas only 36 percent of the younger women were mothers before that age. Many lived with their partners before getting married, some stayed in cohabiting relationships, and some had children before getting married. The choices made by the mothers from the younger cohort demonstrated a tendency for a more independent motherhood, which indicates that the influences of the ‘New Polish Woman’ discourse were apparent in the narratives these younger women produced.

It appears that these younger women were also either secular or were not practising Catholics. Interestingly, almost all the women from the older generation (except for one who openly defined herself as an atheist) not only declared themselves to be Catholic, but many said they lived their lives according to Catholic teachings. The differences between the cohorts indicate not only that there is a turn away from the Catholic Church but also demonstrate the diminishing power of the Church on the lives of some specific groups of women in Poland. This might be indicative of shifts in the patterns of family life, gender relations, and self-identity amongst this group of women, a feature of many European countries in late-modernity.⁹⁶

The diminishing role of tradition, which in Poland links closely with the Catholic religion, is seen as a part of the wider trend taking place within the late-modern context (Kemp, 2004; Mandes, 2004; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995:46). In the views of the younger women the Catholic Church is not anymore a force that they feel is shaping their lives in the ways it did

for the older generation. In fact, despite arguments about the Church exhorting women to take up their supposedly natural roles of focusing exclusively on family and motherhood, the attitudes of this particular group of younger educated women from urban areas towards the unitary role of a reproducer stood in stark contrast to this. These women spoke about the importance of resuming professional life after having a child, and in some ways this is very close to the older women combining paid work and family life. The younger participants' narratives were structured around ideas of 'going out of the circle', 'getting a break from the routine' and 'avoiding losing one's mind' when reflecting on their decisions to return to paid work. The following example by Magda illuminates these themes:

I went back to work after six months ... *to go out of the circle* ... and even if I had enough money to stay at home, I would still return to work ... I would surely go back, because I can't imagine *just* sitting at home ... I want to be active professionally, because it gives me pleasure, I like it. (Magda)

They have clearly refuted the idea of being a stay-at-home mother, an attitude similar to the older generation. Furthermore, the women talked about the professional sphere as a place of accomplishment, offering personal independence, and self-realisation rather than necessity. The views of the younger participants indicate shifts in the way women construct their selves as producers when compared with the older cohort. The self as an individual was positioned confidently at the forefront of these younger participants' accounts and, drawing upon the market metanarrative's invocations, the women used ideas of autonomy, self-reliance, responsibility and independence to define their selves (Weiner, 2007:124). Teresa, a 35 year old architect, stated that:

... job enables you to have a life, right? It is a certain professional fulfilment, feeling that you are *doing something more than just sitting at home* ... for me, my job is not only a means of getting money for my family's survival, but also a place where I try to do best with what I learned at university. I try to exercise my skills and I really like the team I work with ... I don't have that ignorant attitude towards my work, that it's only to get the money, no, I try to do my best and to advance my career whenever that's possible.

Despite attaching different values to their production outside the home, they are still following in their mothers' steps of taking up the dual role of producer-reproducer, reflecting at the same time the destiny of many women all over the world. Similarities between the two cohorts emerged also in the way the women negatively assessed the idea of complete devotion to bringing up children and taking care of the household. As with the older mothers, the majority of the younger mothers found staying at home 'boring' and

‘unsatisfactory’, and not fulfilling. According to Ewelina, a 31 year old bank director and a mother of two:

... it's great to be with a child at home, but with time, the constant settings and repeated routine makes you really bored and tired. I had days when I would wake up in the morning around eight or nine and I felt tired already, you know, weary. So ... going back to work was for me a way of getting a break from that routine, I was having a rest, in a way ... I also missed my work when I was on my maternity leave, on certain level I was glad to go back there ... I would never want to be *just* a stay-at-home mum.

In drawing upon the importance of the work outside the home realm, the younger women downgraded the work done by women at home by attaching to it a negative value. This is achieved by attributing values such as personal development or self-satisfaction to their paid work. Their relatively secure employment and higher levels of education clearly offers them more options on the labour market. The women recognise that the opportunity to work outside the home represents a value in itself in terms of personal self worth. This illuminates the stratifying consequences of the post-communist transformation for women's lives and their options on the labour market (Desperak, 2009a; Pollert, 2003; 2005; Hašková, 2007).

In the younger cohort expectations of egalitarian arrangements were also often clear. The women spoke about the role their husbands or partners have in the daily running of the house and caring for children. The men were situated as important actors in these participants' lives, and their shared engagement in the family life was clearly woven throughout the younger women's narratives. The men were much more visible in the younger cohort data signifying changed normative ideas around caring practices in family lives: the women spoke about their husbands and partners as helping them and the women thought that it is impossible for one person to deal with everything without any help. By engaging their husbands/partners the women allocated aspects of competence to their husbands and partners within the area that was previously associated exclusively with women (but also claimed by the women as their area of expertise). Unlike their mothers' generation, these younger women often presented themselves as unwilling in accepting the destiny of a family matriarch. In behaviours which imply re-negotiation of 'gender fates' this group of mothers, in the post-communist era, no longer want to replicate blindly the destinies of their mothers (Beck and Beck Gernsheim, 1995:27; Miller, 2005:48). The following accounts offer a flavour of what was a dominant theme in the narratives of the younger women:

... today, there are *the same expectations* towards men as there are towards women in terms of responsibilities and duties at home, it's divided equally between both of them. At least that's how it is in my house. When we come home he takes care

of cooking the dinner, and I help our daughter with the homework. I guess it's similar in other houses too ... I believe that in every house if two people work professionally responsibilities at home must be shared, it's just *impossible for one person, for a woman, to take care of it alone*. I think it's a norm that men today do everything that only women did before. (Aneta)

I see a man as a partner who is *participating in the family life* at all levels. I believe this expectation may be stemming from the fact that all *the changes, the communism collapse brought with, have shaped women's perceptions about women's and men's roles, and consequently have changed the prearranged dynamics between partners*. Every woman needs help at home, especially if she is working professionally outside the house. *It's impossible for one human being to deal with everything without any help*. Man's role should be that of a partner, he even should come up with some initiative. Then you have a comfort that you are not alone, that you can count on someone else. (Iza)

... [as women are more emancipated today] *the role of a man has evolved* too; in many households it is similarly to mine – a woman is the one who earns more, and it was actually my husband who stayed at home with our baby and I went back to work. There are obviously still many traditional homes where women don't even work, but around me I see many changes. (Ewelina)

The accounts provided by the younger women focused on demonstrating their husbands/partners active participation in child-caring and household responsibilities. The women spoke about expectations towards men in regard to the home realm, but also about fathers' visibility on the streets with children and their greater engagement in the hands-on practices. These accounts demonstrate both quantitative and qualitative involvement of men in child-related activities, which engages with ongoing debates on men's lives, masculinities, and fatherhood in other (mainly) Western societies (e.g. Gatrell, 2005:134-148; Warin *et al.*, 1999; Miller, 2010). Consequently, this indicates shifts in traditional ideas around caring practices and points to redefinitions of men's and women's normative roles within the family. These shifts are associated with the systemic change and linked with what the women called a 'mentality change' taking place among some men as a result of those political, social, and cultural changes. This idea of a change in how men can engage in family life amongst the younger generation of men is replicated further in the accounts of the older generation of women, some of whom particularly highlighted a shift in attitudes related to practices around childbirth and childcare areas:

... men now ... you know, 20 years ago ... a man had a different *mentality* ... now they are *partners* ... They know from the beginning that they will be *partners*, not that he will be the head of the family, and they know that it depends on who will get a better job. Now, *man can even take paternity leave*, back then it was unthinkable. (Alicja)

... today *men even assist women during the labour* ... before it was even hard to imagine ... a man is helping a woman much more these days. They are like *partners*. (Wanda)

Unlike the narratives produced by the older cohort, the accounts provided by these younger women were often focused on demonstrating men's active participation in child-caring and household responsibilities. The post-communist transformation has been accompanied by corresponding changes in the social structure prompting shifts in hegemonic ideals of femininity and masculinity (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000:15). The ways fatherhood, and thus also motherhood, responsibilities are conceptualised and expected to be exercised have been subject to a social shift (Arcimowicz, 2007b; Łaciak, 2007; Fuszara, 2007). Studies report that since the early 1990s (i.e. immediately after the collapse of the communist system in 1989) the processes affecting families in Western societies (such as the changing nature of relationships and the growing diversity of family types) became noticeable also in Poland (e.g. Adamski, 2002; Slany, 2002; Marody, 2000). This has also consequently led to a re-evaluation of the role of the father. As an example, Aneta, mother of one and an office worker, described her experience of participating in an event in her daughter's kindergarten:

One day ... the children were preparing a little show to celebrate the dad's day. When all the parents gathered, at some point the teacher came and read aloud what the children wrote about their fathers; about their jobs, hobbies and things they do in the house. So, she started reading: 'my dad does the hoovering at home, and he takes the rubbish out, cleans the dishes and cooks the dinner ...' and so on. When she finished, she asked dads to raise a hand if it's about them, and guess what, over 90 percent of men present raised their hands. That's how it is today.

The change carried with it a symbolic disappearance of the Iron Curtain, which was not only dividing Europe politically and ideologically, but most crucially restricted the Soviet Bloc societies from making any social, cultural or intellectual exchange with the Western world. After the communist collapse, social and cultural trends characterising the Western societies found their way into the Polish context (and other countries' in the region) affecting and shaping people's lives and families (Carling *et al.*, 2002). The late-modern context characterising late capitalist societies, with more choice, greater freedom, and a stronger focus on individuality, began to influence lives of women and men also in the post-communist countries (Giddens, 1992). Late-modernity provided the conditions in which new and different possibilities exist for (some) individuals to practice agency in ways that earlier generations may not have been able to because of different structural constraints (Heelas, *et al.*, 1996; Lash, 1994).

Another significant difference between the younger women's accounts and those of the older cohort was set around the idea of individuality (Giddens, 1991, 1992, 1994; Beck, 1992; Bauman 2000). The younger women, similarly to the older mothers, positioned themselves in the dual roles of producers-reproducers, yet they also often spoke about themselves as

individuals. This was in contrast to the older cohort's narratives, where the women following the communist state's ideas of womanhood repeatedly positioned their experiences exclusively within the house, child, and work related environments. The younger mothers spoke about focusing on their own pleasures, having me-time, and having time for oneself. Their accounts were expressions of individuality and illustrate an intergenerational shift in the way the self can be understood and narrated (Giddens, 1992). The heightened individuality can be related to the collapse of the communist system: the greater choice and opportunities, easier access to dominant trends and the lifestyle options linked closely with a strong focus on the self as promoted in the Western world. This is also related to the appearance of the civil sphere which has redefined the public/private divide and some of the responsibilities previously rooted in these spheres. In advancing the 'human capital prerequisites', especially education, these women can be seen to have engaged with a discourse of the liberated individual (Weiner, 2007). In accordance with the market metanarrative, in their views, their capacities privileged them to experience their gender role as mothers in a way that sets their understandings and practices apart from those of their mothers' generation. For this group of women being a mother in the period of democracy following communism enables them to present themselves in ways which echo ideas and images of the 'New Polish Woman': they have successful professional lives where they seek self-satisfaction and they have planned their mothering and negotiated their gender relations at home (Seibert, 2001). The shifts in the lives of these younger women as compared with the older cohort illustrate redefinitions and reconstructions of discourses and practices surrounding women's experiences and narrations of motherhood.

Motherhood and the Transformation

Being a mother is seen as both intimate and individual, but also as a socially responsible objective (Miller, 2005). Motherhood as an institution provides the 'context in which mothering takes place and is experienced', and is shaped historically, socially, culturally, politically and morally (Miller, 2005:3). The state policies on providing adequate support for mothers in a form of childcare facilities, social benefits, and protection at the work place can significantly assist women with meeting the demands of maternal work, and enable them to combine efficiently their various social roles meeting expectations of social acceptability (Ruddick, 1989). Conversely, the absence of adequate support circumscribes women's options and can disadvantage them. In Poland, the prevailing model of a working mother, a heritage of the previous political system, considerably shapes women's views, behaviours,

attitudes and life decisions on having children and working outside of the home. The post-1989 political, economic and social transformation of Poland had a very significant impact on the lives of Polish women, and prompted shifts both on the institutional (macro) but also attitudinal (micro) levels. The following analysis offers a revision of accounts, which illustrate the transformation of experiences of motherhood in Poland. The women from both cohorts were asked to reflect on their lives before the collapse of the communist system. Because of the age difference, looking at the communist era was for the older generation linked with the women's experiences as young mothers, whilst for the younger women this was about sharing their memories of their childhood experiences. Thus, the younger women often spoke about the experiences of the older women in their families: mothers, aunts, and sisters. The intergenerational comparison on what it was like to be a mother during the communist era and what is it like to be a mother today, provides rich analytical material, which exposes not only their views on what constitutes good motherhood in each period, but also is an excellent example of how the women have evaluated the social and political transformations through this period of change.

The contrasting notions of 'greyness' and 'dullness' and vivid multicolour were often used when the women compared the two periods. The assessment of the transformation has been generally regarded as positive for the first decade following the collapse of the communist system. In keeping with the market metanarrative's foundational script, the 1990s were seen as offering many new opportunities, especially for young people, full of novel possibilities to get a good job and earn well (Weiner, 2007). This has dramatically changed, according to the participants in the new millennium, and the years after 2000 have been characterised by growing unemployment, the sense of which was at times overwhelmingly present in the women's narratives when I collected the data in the years 2005-2006. Many women from both generations spoke of the problem of unemployment. Their fear of becoming affected by the lack of job surfaced repeatedly. For example, Ewelina (younger cohort) a bank manager and a mother of two on maternity leave during the time of the interview, despite a successful professional career and a relatively secure position still wondered about her employment prospects when her leave ends. This theme resurfaced several times in her account:

... my pregnancy was endangered so I couldn't work for as long as with the first one. I had to take the sick leave for the last 5 months of my pregnancy. With my work ... I hope everything will be fine ... My work has been divided between a few people in the department, and the season currently isn't too busy so ... I really hope I will have a place to go back to.

In a similar way to the findings in Anita Seibert's (2001) research on the lives of Polish women in the post-1989 Poland, the majority of the participants did not talk about wider

political, economic and social reforms as such, rather discussing changes in terms of more specific issues relevant to their individual, everyday lives.

For the older generation, the security and support offered by the system meant that they could afford not to worry about becoming a mother, staying at home to care for their young children, and returning to work even after a few years' break. Generally, the older women thought that being a mother was much easier in their time than it was now for the younger women. Whilst the older women recognised that in the previous times it was like 'living in a rat-hole', the straightforwardness, predictability and certainty of life, especially for a woman, were seen as a comfort, offering mothers 'peace of mind'. The older participants often spoke about the younger mothers today with lots of sympathy for the current environment in which they mothered and which in their eyes was really 'stressful'. In spite of acknowledging the greater availability of practical items such as nappies, baby's clothes or ready meals, which were noted as a positive change for mothers, the older women thought that the younger generation were now at a greater disadvantage. This extract from a 47 year old cook and a mother of three exemplifies this attitude:

I feel that it is more difficult for them emotionally, mentally, you know. Before, we, young women, we didn't worry too much ... And if you lost one job you would easily and very quickly got another one ... So, I didn't worry that I'll get pregnant, that I'll be sucked, that I'll be unemployed. It was like that: you got pregnant, then you went on a paid maternity leave, and you came back to your work, and you had a place in the kindergarten for your child. We had this comfort, this emotional comfort, no stress, when I got pregnant I wasn't afraid that I'll lose my job. I took my maternity leave and later on I came back to my work. And now, I know, the younger generation, maybe she would like to have a baby, but once you start working you can't, because you'll lose your job. For me, you know, I believe, that these young women must be emotionally exhausted, because maybe she would like to be a mum but she is afraid of being unemployed. (Olga)

When the older women reflected on the younger generation, their narratives were saturated with notions of fear and worry, in particular about unemployment. This was seen as a reason for the postponement of becoming a mother or the decision not to have children at all. When talking about the changes in the labour market, the older participants repeatedly stressed the general availability of employment during the communist era as one of the most important aspects of women's lives in the previous era. Their accounts of the work experience during communism highlighted the universal access to work for everyone, the ease of finding alternative employment and lack of stress related to potential unemployment. These characteristics of the occupational sphere were frequently emphasised by the women and seen as the main positive features, especially for women with children. Subsequently, whilst recognising the positive aspects of the transformation – the greater opportunities for vocational development and possibilities for self-fulfilment – most of the older cohort

thought that changes in the labour market were negatively impacting on younger mothers, who now faced fears of unemployment, and who could be forced to choose between motherhood and professional work. The potential problem of unemployment was a common theme in many women's accounts, even though none of them were personally without work at the time of the interviews, although some husbands were. This was the case for Irena, a 53-year-old mother of two daughters, whose husband has been affected by a long-term unemployment:

... my husband doesn't have a job ... and there are no prospects that he will have one. So, the reality of today, the capitalism and the free market rules that we have now. . . he didn't find his feet ... our generation, we were never prepared or trained how to find yourself in such world how to ... promote yourself, no one taught us things like that. We were taught to be obedient, law-abiding ... (Irena)

Drawing on the demands and expectations of the neoliberal discourses, Irena constructs her own narrative where the new rules of capitalism form an excluding and unsympathetic environment for people from her generation. In ways that are similar to the views of the Czech female factory workers described by Weiner (2007:95), Irena's interpretation is that socialism has sullied them: the expectations of the 'socialist citizen' to fit within the roles prescribed by the system did not facilitate the skills called upon in neoliberal discourses of the worker. According to Irena, it is the new generations who will be able to better meet the capitalist behavioural demands. But some of the younger women, despite not being affected by the problem, still expressed their fears of the possibility of becoming unemployed. This point is illustrated by the following extracts:

.... bigger stress, the anxiety about the job either yours or your husband's. Women today fear to have children, because they can't afford to have a place of their own, everything is so expensive ... everything revolves around the job: your worry about keeping it, your worry about the next salary. Before, people had more money, but then the shelves in the shops were empty. Now, the shops are packed, but people can't afford, what a pity for children who can see it all, who can see that their colleagues at school have something, but some parents just can't afford it. (Aneta, younger cohort)

Many women today have the fear of getting pregnant and having children because they're anxious about losing their jobs, and that's indeed a very negative sign of current times. And I had that anxiety when I was having my children too, with each of them I worried whether I will have my job when I finally go back to work after my maternity leave. (Helena, younger cohort)

Despite their advantages of possessing the market-mandated set of behaviours (independence, responsibility, and self-reliance) and coming from an economically privileged locality, the women's experiences as working mothers do not shield them from the more negative aspects of transformation. As I have argued in Chapter 3 in regard to the negative aspects of the transformation, these women's concerns highlight the complexities

of the post-communist environment and underline the scale of the problem of unemployment, poverty, and social stratification in Poland.⁹⁷

The women from both generations noted the new rules of the new economic structures. These include a good education and other vocational skills which were highlighted as necessary not only for career advancement but also seen as requirements for securing a job. Here, the younger women often seemed to position themselves as those who have more difficulties compared to the experiences of the older generation for whom the state 'ensured' jobs. Despite some criticism of the apparent lack of efficiency in a day-to-day work during the communist era, the general assumption of the younger cohort was that the life arrangements in the past enabled people to live their lives at a slower pace with more time for family life. This point is illustrated in the excerpt of a 31-year-old married mother of two children who was a managing director in a bank:

Before, people worked less and had more time for their families, for doing things together, now we spend so much time working professionally. The quality of that work is different too. Before, you would start your day at work with three cups of coffees, five cigarettes, and endless chats with your co-workers, and then you popped out to a hairdresser or joined a queue because there was some delivery in a nearby shop, then when you actually sat at your desk it was time to finish. Today it is completely different: I'm back at home late and I hardly have the time for my children. (Ewelina)

The fact that life was more 'scheduled' because of the limitations imposed by the regime was actually seen by some women from both generations as a specific benefit. The women thought that this aspect of the previous era saved the stress of everyday worry about keeping a job, but also about the future of children, seen by the women as features of contemporary life. The fact that there was a relatively pre-defined path for everyone, with secured education, employment, health and childcare provisions, long awaited but tenable accommodation and subsidised food, was pictured by the many women, especially from the older cohort, as more socially equal than the 'wild capitalism'. Consumerism, driving the 'quality' of life and shaping the expectations of children on the one hand, and the high prices delineating what the parents can actually afford on the other, were also noted as shaping in uneven ways the experience of being a mother today. The shifts in patterns of family formation were discussed by the younger women too; the financial inadequacy of the state support and the difficult situation in the labour market were seen as driven mainly by the fear of unemployment. Other influencing factors included growing living costs and the unequal distribution of time between work and private life, which were for some of them genuine reasons for late motherhood but also often contributed to the decision not to have more children.

Nonetheless, an analysis of the younger women's accounts demonstrates that they generally agree that being a mother today is easier because of the conveniences and better availability of consumer goods facilitated by the market. Of equal importance was the positive view of partners who were presented as more involved in the childcare. Reflecting on their own mothers' lives, the younger cohort spoke about the lack of consumer choice and the shopping experience as particularly vivid memories of the communist era: long queues, food rationing, scarcity of products linked with personal hygiene and baby care (such as sanitary towels, cotton wool pads, washing powder, toilet paper), empty shelves in the shops, people having money but nothing to spend it on, were all seen as affecting women specifically. The general ironies of everyday life are best captured by an account provided by a 33-year-old mother of one:

I always admired the shop assistants who had to deal with that; you have a shop full of people; everyone is tense because you know, it's the delivery day, and she has to not only serve people and charge them but also calculate these silly ration coupons and know what to cut out from the sheet ... But later on, an even bigger shock for me as a young child, was when they were going to withdraw these ration coupons, I thought how people will live, how will they know what to buy and how much to buy, I thought that they will buy out everything immediately if they won't have the rations to control them. I was a child, you know, and I couldn't imagine a different world to the one I was used to, I thought that this is how the adults' life looks like, that's how you buy things, that's how it works, and that's how I will carry on as an adult. (Maja)

Furthermore, the mothers were seen as those who were mainly responsible for the childcare at home, preparing the food, 'hunting' and organising the goods. Yet still, the women recognised the positive aspects of being a mother during the communist era. The social security offered by the state in the form of maternity benefits and jobs for everyone, was in the view of the younger women seen as enhancing positively the experience of being a mother. The women also appreciated the social provisions for lone mothers and poor families, as well as the ability to take children on holidays because of the state subsidies, seeing them as attractive perks of the old system. Especially nostalgic were the younger women's recollections of how their mothers 'were there' for them (ironic given the state care and all women working), as opposed to the illustration of the contemporary working mother as consumed by the paid work. In these positive views of the communist reality, the young women spoke about their mothers having time to take their children for a walk, on holidays, to cook home-made meals and bake cakes at weekends. In these (misplaced) nostalgic accounts, however, something much more complex transpires: the younger women appear to long for the idea of the 'super-mother'. In their narrations, this model of mothering has time for professional work, but also is always 'there' for her children, she does the home cooking, and can mend clothes, she tends the allotment to provide fresh food, and makes preserves for

the winter. She does it all by sacrificing herself—using her evenings or even nights, when everyone is asleep: she always manages with everything and never complains. The following excerpts illustrate these idealised visions:

My mum could do many things herself though ... she knew how to sew, knit, embroider, how to mend the clothes ... she *sacrificed her evenings or even nights* for that, because, you know, she was working professionally, and then there was the three of us ... but, somehow *she managed to do it all*, and *I don't really remember her complaining* ... and I never have time for anything ... my daughter doesn't know what it means: daily shopping together, walks holding hands with mum or running in the backyard, there is no time for that today. (Aneta)

... there were four of us siblings and it was always cheerful in our house. Surely, our mothers, like I remember mine, had to make some extra efforts to make nice food having limited resources ... There was more home-cooking and baking; I remember my mother would *bake cakes every weekend* so we could have something sweet to eat. Also we had *a small allotment*, so we would have lots of fresh vegetables that *my mother grew*, and fruit, and *she made many preserves for the winter time* using that fruit and vegetables. (Ewelina)

... the mother was somehow always there for us children ... we may not have eaten the chocolate for weeks but *the mother was always there* ... it was just different ... there was a time to go for a walk with children to a park, to take them for holidays, to visit people ... and today we just don't have it anymore. Even though my mother worked professionally she always would find time to be with us. (Iza)

These nostalgic recollections of the younger cohort, put beside their earlier accounts of themselves, which more closely fit the image of the 'New Polish Woman', expose the contradictions in constructions of ourselves. Whilst some threads of their narratives reveal young mothers satisfied with their lives, elsewhere their accounts expose the struggle for these women to live up to this seemingly contented image of the 'modern mum'. Through their evocative childhood accounts these women can be seen as yearning for a specific version of motherhood as embodied by their mothers in their recollections. So, whilst assessing the experience of motherhood during the communist era to be much harder and more disadvantaged, these women seem to be longing for the particular version of motherhood it created. Despite distancing themselves from the destiny of the abstract selfless matriarch of the communist era, these women still produced counter-accounts where they juxtapose and assess themselves as mothers against the representations of their own mothers. The specific ideals of motherhood woven through the narratives of the younger women have historical depth and despite the cultural changes brought about by the transformation, are still shaped by the powerful ideals surrounding motherhood in Poland.

Matka Polka as Representation and Identity

There are general historical shifts and continuities in women's experiences as mothers. There are also particular shifts and continuities in women's positions that are specific to Poland. The idea of Matka Polka is one such cultural archetype which in powerful and continuous ways circumscribes women's experiences as mothers. Having discussed the roots of this idea earlier in the thesis, in the present section I look at how Matka Polka figured in the narratives of the women from both generations. This is in order to demonstrate its continued relevance for the lives of the participants. The image of Matka Polka featured in different ways across all the interview narratives even though no direct questions were asked about this image. In the ensuing interviews, once the myth appeared as something of interest or was raised by the participants, I then followed this line of enquiry. Many of the women spoke of Matka Polka as associated with an overworked mother of many children completely absorbed by domestic responsibilities and addressing the needs of her children and husband. In contrast to Seibert's research, where Matka Polka was linked with a stereotype and evaluated in negative terms (2001:198; 243), some of my participants, from both generations, associated the image positively with patriotism, tradition, and cultivating national heritage by bringing up children in the love for their 'motherland'. Many of the women stated that they either would like to think of themselves as Matka Polka or believed they fitted the model. All the women prioritised family and their children over their professional careers, with the younger generation balancing this by highlighting the importance of self-fulfilment alongside family's needs. A minority of participants, who rejected the idea by stating it was no longer relevant, perceived the image as a manipulative construct from the old communist state.

The idea of Matka Polka as a prominent female symbol prevails in contemporary Polish public discourse. It is commonly used in everyday language so that it has become a symbolic point of reference for many Polish women, even those who are not mothers. For some of the women who I interviewed, the idea represented the embodiment of what it means to be an ordinary Polish woman. Aneta, a 33-year-old mother of one living in Warszawa, said: 'We have a laugh with my girlfriends from work, every time when we walk home together carrying many shopping bags... we laugh that we are like Matka Polkas.' Here, a seemingly simple activity of carrying many shopping bags after work is identified with Matka Polka because these women realise that shopping involves more burdens than just the heaviness of the bags: it is about planning the family meals, financial management of the family resources and monitoring household supplies. These responsibilities are an intrinsic part of the myth of

Matka Polka. Both cohorts of women interviewed offered varying versions of Matka Polka, from a role model to live up to, through other descriptions touching on nationalistic notes, to a ridiculed and cynical image with pejorative undertones. Yet, regardless of the positive or negative dimensions in which she was regarded, Matka Polka was almost univocally perceived as *being there* for others, as hard-working, and as good, even if frustratingly impossible to accommodate by some. Devotion, sacrifice, and the ability to cope or manage with whatever life throws at her were invoked as among her main attributes.

Interestingly for such a recognisable symbol, there are no obvious visual representations of Matka Polka. She is absent from the arts and popular culture. There is not a single visual image that could be unequivocally referred to as representing this powerful myth. The few sculptures which do exist do not embody the common understanding of this complex and multifaceted symbol. It remains surprising then that such a dominant emblem is largely missing from the national iconography. This could be due to the fact that on the one hand Matka Polka is often closely linked with the Virgin Mary whose images are plentiful in the Polish churches, or it could be because she is perceived as a representation of an unexceptional, average ordinary woman. As one of the participants explained: 'Matka Polka is the ordinary woman you see on the street, *we are all her*'. Importantly, Matka Polka was historically employed in propagandist rhetoric to promote or deal with national missions (Fidelis, 2004:301) and used as a tool of pressure in the hands of the ruling powers. Whether this was as a political, religious or cultural force, which symbolised contradictory meanings, many women have identified with this symbol. For some, Matka Polka (almost) embodied and carried around an element of being female.

Given the absence of an obvious visual illustration of Matka Polka, it is remarkable that the women who were interviewed were all clear in their descriptions of Matka Polka. Many provided an almost tangible picture of what she looks like and who she is:

I see Matka Polka as a working woman carrying *heavy* shopping bags ... she runs home from work, drops the shopping in the hallway and runs to the kitchen to the pots. We still have them in Poland, my friend is an example, *everything is on her shoulders* and she doesn't have *any support*. Matka Polka is someone working very *hard*, carrying *heavy* shopping bags and she is usually on her own with it all. (Ryta, older cohort)

Matka Polka ... is a woman who drives the tractor until 3pm and then goes to pick up her offspring from the kindergarten and goes home to cook dinner for the husband who is coming home in the evening ... surely she is a *heroic* woman, nothing can possibly tire her. (Antonia, older cohort)

She is someone who carries many bags, loves her family very much, and takes care of that family ... she does as much as she can ... Her main characteristic is that

she loves and cares for her family very much; she is *devoted* to her family. That's who she is. (Aneta, younger cohort)

It's this woman who works and keeps the house, she carries *heavy* bags with shopping, and does the cleaning, and is surrounded by lots of her children. She is someone who has *everything on her shoulders*: professional work, house duties, children, shopping, just everything. (Weronika, younger cohort)

The idea of 'heaviness', with regard to the shopping bags, but also in the general existence of Matka Polka, of her everyday life, was a dominant theme across the accounts:

I associate Matka Polka with an exhausted woman carrying *heavy* shopping bags with children around, with an iron in one hand, stirring food in the pots in the other hand ... very *drained* woman ... drained from physical labour ... Matka Polka is *alone*, no one helps her, her husband is only a very blurred person, either drunk or just laying on the couch in front of TV, and she is so ... *devoted* to her children and her house, and she has only new responsibilities being added and she takes them on, because she is that Matka Polka. ... it was *forced* on us, women, so much. (Amelia, older cohort)

In the above extracts participants of both generations provided a wide range of descriptions of Matka Polka, yet all of them were rooted in a familiar and similar imagery—someone who is closely linked with a family, working hard, being devoted, and having everything on her shoulders. Amelia, a 55-year-old mother of two who lives in Warszawa, also noted that the idea of Matka Polka was 'forced on women' supporting the claims that the myth had served as a manipulative device in the hands of authorities. Similarly, Pola, a 26 years old mother of one, who works as an office manager in a health spa, links Matka Polka with the communist propaganda:

Communists propagated this image, this idea, in order maybe to add some importance or ... appreciation for women. 'Matka Polka is MATKA POLKÁ, there are no other such important mothers, only Polish ones.' And I believe it was done in order to lift women's spirits, so they wouldn't feel so oppressed, you know, here you've got: 'you are Matka Polka and you should be proud of that'.

Although the roots of the myth emanate from the eighteenth century, the participants often associated Matka Polka with the communist period. As one of the participants from the older cohort stated, for many 'she is...a socialist mother'. But the aspects of the communist heritage should not be overshadowed by the patriotic undertones that the myth carries. This nationalistic dimension of Matka Polka could perhaps best be seen in the following extract. In it, Elwira, a 51-year-old mother of three and a civil servant whose husband is long-term unemployed leaving Elwira with the main responsibility of financially supporting her family, stated:

Elwira: Matka Polka? [It is] a symbol. It means that just as Poland as a country was fighting for many years for its independence, went through partitions, wars, communism ... throughout its history Poland was fighting ... so a Polish woman is this mother, who fights for herself and her children.

Anna: Do you think that only Polish women are like that, how about mothers from other countries?

Elwira: I think so, only Polish women are like that. That's why we say 'Matka Polka.' A Polish mother fights for her family like the country was fighting for its independence. And only Matka Polka can fight for her children like that.

This nationalistic aspect of Matka Polka could also be detected in the way participants expressed their relationship to the state. Wanda, for example, sees Matka Polka as someone linked to the state, and clearly identifies herself with the symbol when she speaks about her attitude towards living abroad:

Matka Polka is most importantly Polish. Well, I think that it is connected with the state, that she is someone closely tied to the country ... well ... I, for example, would never go to live abroad. Me personally, I would never, even though there was a possibility at some point (Wanda, older cohort).

The concept of Matka Polka is understood with subtly different definitions by each participant. The women from both generations enhanced various aspects of the same myth – of a hard working woman, often alone in her struggle, closely linked with the ideas of the nation-state, and often seen as a manipulating tool in the hands of the ruling powers. The myth of Matka Polka is well known to almost everyone in Poland, even though there is no clear consensus on what it represents.

For many of the participants the myth had positive associations and it was a reference point with which they were proud to identify themselves. Amongst those who referred to Matka Polka were women from both generations, demonstrating the enduring elements of the myth for these women's lives. The following two excerpts illustrate how some participants positioned themselves in relation to the myth:

Matka Polka ... my brother always calls me that ... everything for the children, because I am like that, that's what is most important for me. Well, Matka Polka ... she would do everything to get anything ... for her children ... I feel like that. I feel very much like Matka Polka. (Olga, older cohort)

I know women like that, and I admire them ... they live very modestly but they are very proud and happy to have all these children ... and for a woman like that clothes or stuff for herself are not important, but rather the things she does every day for her children, and when she sees all of them sitting together to have a dinner, that's what makes her happy. And I feel the same. I think, that's what Matka Polka's like; she doesn't care that much about herself ... she gives just to her children, to her family ... she doesn't care to have a new piece of clothing or a new pair of shoes. I try to be like that but we'll see where my efforts go. We'll see how my children cope with life. (Kasia, younger cohort)

Amongst those talking positively about Matka Polka was Kasia, a stay-at-home mother of three. Kasia spoke about women like Matka Polka with admiration, and visibly aspired to perceive herself as one of these women. The two main characteristics of the myth, self-sacrifice and the ability to cope, were articulated in Kasia's account. For instance the idea of coping was narrated in the way Kasia spoke about her motherly role, for her it was about preparing her children to cope with life in the future. Similarly, the sacrifices Matka Polka makes were for her children's better future. Kasia even provides a critique of consumerism to demonstrate the way Matka Polka prioritises ('Matka Polka...doesn't care to have a new piece of clothing or a new pair of shoes'). The fact that Kasia had been a stay-at-home mother for 12 years at the time of my interview will have influenced the aspects of the myth she chose to highlight, such as 'sacrificial motherhood'. Similarly Olga, a mother of three from Kołobrzeg, spoke about doing everything for her children and prioritised her entire existence accordingly: 'that's what is most important for me'. Olga very strongly asserted herself as Matka Polka putting her children at the centre of her life. The theme of prioritising the needs of others, caring for and being good to others, also continues in other extracts:

... she is someone who is good for everyone, who takes care and helps everyone. She is there for everyone. Am I one? It's a difficult question. Probably ... in a way ... I would like to think of myself as one. (Iza, younger cohort)

Matka Polka is someone who cares for others, she helps others, the idea that these women, the Polish women are more maternal, warm ... I don't know ... Yes, I think I am one, I try my best. I try to be a good mother. I try to be good at work, at home, and just generally, right? For others. (Wanda, older cohort)

Here, the identification with Matka Polka was more tentative: the women appraised the figure in an affirming way, with lots of admiring comments ('she is good for everyone', 'takes care and helps everyone')—thus the association that the women made with Matka Polka is less confident, they 'would like to' and 'try to be' a match to the ideal version. Iza and Wanda represent women from two different generations, but they both not only characterised Matka Polka similarly, they also openly aspired to identify themselves with the symbol—it served as a powerful role model. The myth of Matka Polka carries then ideas that are encompassed in notions of 'good mothering.' The ideal version of the myth was also subject to a more flexible interpretation. For example, Aneta, a 33-year-old mother of one, stated that she felt like Matka Polka and thought that she was one; in her account, she appropriated the standards to fit her situation. This offered Aneta an opportunity to believe that one can be Matka Polka by 'just trying' and not necessarily being or doing the best: 'Am I one? I feel like one ... no, I think I am one. Surely, sometimes everyone needs a break to have time for oneself, but I try to do my best'. Aneta's account offers a flavour of a broader trend towards re-interpretation and appropriation of the myth as an ideal. She could

be seen here as if almost referring to the idea of the discourse of the 'good enough mother' present in the Western cultures (Chodorow, 1978; Doane and Devon, 1992). For Aneta, and many other participants, the attempt to 'adjust' the myth to 'fit her own identity' signifies the fact that the concept of the coping mother and the myth of Matka Polka in particular is inescapable for these women in how they make sense of their lives as mothers (Somers and Gibson, 1994:61).

Conclusions

The background and contextual information in this chapter frame the narratives which will be presented in the case studies in Chapters 6 and 7. The chapter offers an insight into the social shifts that have occurred in the lives of the two groups of women and in the way these events have influenced and shaped their experiences and understandings of motherhood from their respective positions of privilege (and economically as the 'winners' following transformation).

The older cohort lived under the doctrine of the 'socialist citizen'. The ideological expectations for them to produce and reproduce, together with patriotic duties to preserve tradition and convey the moral values perpetuated by the Catholic Church, to a large extent defined their willingness to bear children. They were meeting the requirements of a particular time and thus they can be seen in their narratives as accepting a 'pathway' of biological determinism and essentialism. Reflecting the contexts of their lives, womanhood was for them conflated with motherhood. Yet, in line with the communist propaganda, a majority of them assumed the role of the working mother. They lived their lives as 'brave heroines' and these older women drew upon and described the demands of maternal work as embedded in the concept of the coping mother both working professionally and successfully running the house. The fact that these mothers lived a life of relative comfort allowed them a certain degree of altruism towards acquiescing to state preference with the effect that they did prefer to bear more children than the current national average.

The younger mothers did not accept the exclusive responsibility for the work at home and childcare. By implicitly responding to the market metanarrative these mothers assigned different values to work outside the home realm which stressed the importance of the individual (Weiner, 2007). As a consequence, they have also redefined the values on which men's traditional roles in the home and work place tie into their own requirements and expectations. The shift away from the communist condition to the post-communist

environment has been embraced by the group and they have attained a comfortable life. This life potentially enables them to maintain a family with a number of children but one which equally permits them to place the emphasis on their own personal advancement and in which having more than one child is seen as an impediment. The new generation is at odds with the Church-supported redefinitions of the concept of the coping mother that continue to invoke the specific image of Matka Polka in its appeals to preserve traditional notions of Polish womanhood. Such models jar with the neoliberal narrative of individualism.

I have argued so far that the post-communist changes on the economic and political levels have inadvertently shaped the lives of mothers in Poland. The data analysis in this chapter demonstrated how gender, agency and power operated in the two different eras defining lives and identities of these participants as women, mothers and workers. For the older cohort, 'conventional' womanhood required both production and reproduction to the collectively defined and patriarchal state (Ferree, 1995). Significantly, the women did not position themselves as discriminated against in any way; instead, they tried to make sense of their life experiences under the communist regime by presenting themselves as proud and coping working mothers. For the younger cohort, the promise of the free market seemed to come true in ways they attempted to present their motherhood as mature and themselves as satisfied wives and workers. Yet, the greater possibilities, apparent bigger choice and the new freedoms, all offered by the neoliberal context of their urban environment, have been conditioned too. They all, except for one, have been working mothers and the reconciliation of this double-burden has become an important part of their experiences. The ways they have been able to claim the identity of the coping working mother, something the older cohort prided themselves on, is constrained and disciplined not only by the market requirements of the flexible and autonomous worker, but also by the cultural definitions of womanhood in Poland. These themes are further explored in the case studies presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 6

Case Studies - The Mothers of the Communist Era

Introduction

The analysis in the following two chapters is focused on four case studies. This approach offers a valuable and effective framework through which to present and discuss the individual narratives. The raw narratives themselves are transcripts of a series of interviews with a specifically selected group of women. All the women experienced life and motherhood pre and post the transformation of Poland in 1989 and the women could be seen as in a position of a greater access to the apparent benefits offered by the market. This chapter specifically explores the 'narrative self' of two women who mothered during the communist era. The analysis exposes how these women interpreted the social, cultural and economic pressures that determined their lives and ultimately defined their own feelings of self worth.

The subjects have been given the names Aniela and Aleksandra. These case studies illustrate how the narrative 'self' is constructed and how differently these women relate their life stories. The case studies specifically demonstrate the internal complexities and the contradictions of the individuals' lives. The contexts of the two women's lives are considerably different: Aniela has been a working mother for most of her life whilst Aleksandra became a stay-at-home mother after having her first child. The difference exposes the discrepancies between how each woman perceives and understands and expresses her role as a mother. What emerges demonstrates how obdurate some culturally prescribed models of motherhood have become. For these two mothers the paradigm of the coping mother turned out to be a vital point of reference. For Aleksandra, the coping mother is the one who combines mothering with work outside the home realm and as such the one she is not able to identify with. This causes tensions and contradictions in her seemingly contented account of a devoted stay-at-home mother. On the other hand, Aniela refers directly to the concept of the coping mother framing it in two interrelated ways: once invoking Matka Polka as her negative point of reference, and once emphasising the sacrificial element of Polish motherhood to which she subscribes. Through a sequence of complex confrontations and rationalisations, she could be seen as criticising, rejecting and

distancing herself from the dominant perceptions and expectations of Polish motherhood, especially as represented in the myth of Matka Polka.

These case studies have been chosen because of an interesting compilation of factors that they represent. Aniela had her two children in the two different eras, and this element of her experience allowed for an analysis of any possible changes and/or continuities in her experiences of motherhood and mothering. Additionally, Aniela was one of the very few participants who criticised the model of Matka Polka, which transpired in the way she interpreted the values and duties embedded within the myth. Significantly, while rejecting the relevance of the myth to her emancipated and contented life, in fact, through the practices of agency and reflexivity she clearly epitomised the representation of Matka Polka. Aleksandra, on the other hand was one of the only two women who did not work outside of the home realm, and the only one in the older cohort. The other stay-at-home mother, Kasia, from the younger cohort, has been also chosen as a case study and is discussed in the following chapter. Aleksandra's case deserves attention because it illuminates how the powerful representations of the 'proper' Polish womanhood can shape individual lives. While devoting her life to her family and producing a contented account of her experiences within the home realm, Aleksandra struggled with what she perceived as the social pressure to assess herself against the dominant model of the working mother.

Linking to the discussion in Chapter 2, Aniela's case study offers a vivid illustration of the findings by Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2000) regarding women's identity as a 'brave victim'. According to their research, the sense of self-sacrifice for the good of the family engenders feelings of real authority in the private realm. For these women it becomes a form of self gratification and a protective wall against the discrimination they often experience within the home itself. For many women the phrase defines the experience of loneliness when dealing with the economic hardship of the communist era. Aniela's account is constructed around the power relations within the family and private sphere and provides an excellent example that substantiates the original research by Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2000). In her narrative Aniela can be seen to present herself as a happy and fulfilled woman, in control of her life and relationship with her husband. Yet there are internal levels of complexity in Aniela's narrative. For example, in a reaction to stereotypical notions of Polish womanhood, Aniela narrates her experiences so as to reposition herself above these notions and deconstructs them into a framework she prefers. Yet in distancing herself from the self-sacrificing Matka Polka, Aniela ultimately reinforces some of the aspects of the symbol she so resents. This case study provides an important example of how the myth of

Matka Polka can be both robustly rejected, and yet remain so powerfully dominant in a narrative. Aniela (54) is in full-time employment and has a university degree.

The case study of Aleksandra has been selected because it offers significant insights into the processes of 'narrative construction' of a self which reveal internal pressures and contradictions. For Aleksandra the opportunity for self-reflexivity as a reaction to the interview situation was palpably constructive. Her interpretation and retelling of the control and power she thought she had in her married life is layered with contradictions. She presents herself as the wiser partner and therefore wholly responsible for the smooth functioning of the family. Aleksandra positions herself as a devoted mother and a competent wife who not only raises her children but is also able to influence her husband to fulfil the ideal version of a well adjusted nuclear family. The dominant theme in Aleksandra's narrative is her status as a full-time mother. In counterbalancing the threads of contentment and frustration, she used the interview situation to make sense of her role as a stay-at-home mother. Presenting Aleksandra's account as a case study reveals how individuals can shape the narratives they produce to down play or elevate aspects of a self profile to accommodate the personal perception of peer group acceptability or respect. In Aleksandra's case this is specifically focussed on the idea of gendered identity. In a context in which Aleksandra saw a prevailing 'norm' as being that of a working mother, she downplayed and devalued her own work within the home sphere. In Poland the model of the working mother represents a dominant construction of womanhood that continues to influence some women's lives. For a woman like Aleksandra who could afford (economically because her husband ran a successful business) not to undertake paid work but to devote her life to her family, her dissatisfaction that she did just that left her feeling unfulfilled and distressed.

Aniela

Aniela was 54 years old in 2006 when I interviewed her. She was married and a mother of two. She provides an interesting case in some respect as she bridged the two cohorts. Her children were born in different eras: her son was born in 1980 in the midst of the communist regime, and her daughter in 1991, shortly after the breakthrough events. Her experiences as a mother and a worker were thus influenced by a dramatically changing socio-political environment.

Aniela and her husband both have higher degree; she was a qualified architect and he was employed as a university professor. They both lived in Szczecin and she maintains they are

practicing Catholics. The significance of religion in Aniela's life was made clear when she disclosed that she never used contraceptive pills and relies on natural birth control methods. Aniela said she would never consider having an abortion, as she put it, 'if God gives us children we'll have them'. She also stressed the importance of her upbringing by a very religious mother and her own determination to send her daughter to a Catholic school. For Aniela religion was closely linked with the specific values of culture and tradition, an ideal which the whole family tried to foster by regularly attending Sunday mass together. Aniela's interview lasted over four hours and was full of very detailed stories. These included her poor relationship with her parents-in-law, especially her mother-in-law, interspersed with accounts of her dating adventures when she was young. Generally, Aniela presented herself as an emancipated and 'great woman' who was pleased with her life and did not feel 'the burden of being a woman'. Aniela also thought that women in Poland were liberated and respected, especially if they were mothers. When looking at the transformation she passionately denounced the communist past for its greyness, dullness, poverty, and primitive everyday life. She spoke about the cost of a bra being equal to a month's salary, toothpaste brought from abroad, empty shelves in the shops, 'hideous queues' where people pushed each other around to get anything. She mentions rationed toilet paper which as a result was regularly stolen from her place of work:

... those times were really discreditable for people ... the cost of a bra for instance was equal to a monthly salary, it was horrible ... to bring from abroad a toothpaste, because ours was more like plaster rather than paste...in the shops there was nothing in stock only empty hooks, something horrible ... I remember or the hideous queues, God, everyone pushing around the others ... and the ration coupons ... There was no toilet paper; people would use newspapers ... yes, the same rations at work for everyone for the toilet paper, sugar, tea, but people would steal even from the toilets at work ...

Yet, she noted with a hint of nostalgia the lack of financial differences between people, which in her opinion made people feel closer together. But she also said that the current post-communist environment was much better and that she preferred her life now as there is a recognition and respect for intelligent people, implying that she meant people like her.

Aniela worked professionally before having her first child in 1980 and returned to work after what she thought was a very short time – one year. This was, as Aniela stated, due to the fact that her in-laws were able to help with the care of the child. This presumably was also for economic reasons as there was no financial support from the state beyond the first 16 weeks of paid maternity leave. Paid childcare leave was introduced in 1981 and this influenced Aniela's decision to stay at home with her second child for four years (adding unpaid

allowances). It is clear from Aniela's account below that the changes in the labour market relations shifted her attitude towards paid work. This extract sees Aniela reflecting on her experiences during communism:

... a job, for me, was important, but only during the working hours. I always looked for a job that would finish in the early afternoon and that's it, I never try to get any high positions, because I knew what it meant. ... I've assumed, from the very beginning, that I will not be having any great professional career. Why? Back then, during communism, a professional career was something artificial, something false.

The following extract arose when Aniela was relaying her experiences of becoming a mother for the second time during the early transformation period:

I took paid maternity leave and then I used the unpaid allowances. I knew that I would lose that job, and it was a good job... meanwhile the company got privatised and the salaries went up, but well, it didn't matter to me that much at that time. I came back to that company to take up another position, I was in the managerial role before I left, and it wasn't the same; the company changed, people changed and the atmosphere wasn't right ... I decided that I would look for something else. That was 1996. I found a job and I'm still working there. It's a specialised institution, which deals with issues of public health by controlling and supervising hygiene conditions in a variety of life aspects, they also gather information and data about epidemics ... When I first started that job, being of a mature age already, I was a bit worried, but then you learn to be more open and communicative in relations with other people, and this is good because I can see that I have also become more courageous and open.

These extracts highlight the differing work environments during and after communism and Aniela's attitude towards motherhood and work through these different eras. Throughout the communist era it was relatively easy to change jobs, there were always vacancies open for those who sought alternative employment. Aniela could afford not to worry about her career and it is noted elsewhere that many women did not care much about vocational advancement during that time (see Chapter 2). But despite using the language of not caring about work status it is clear that she had held a more prestigious job in the communist times. Significantly, and what perhaps does not strike immediately from Aniela's normally detailed account, is that following the 1989 transition Aniela was actually forced to re-train and take a job as a hygiene consultant and laboratory analyst. This fact illustrates the shifts on the labour market and the differences in the state policies regarding maternal leave and job security. While Aniela had been able to resume her work after the maternity leave with her first child during the communist era, the position she held before going on the maternity leave with her second child after the communist collapse was not available any more once her leave ended.

When talking about her mothering Aniela described happy and positive events where the pregnancy, giving birth and being a mother were seen as 'incredible experiences': 'very special and intimate'. A personal disclosure on how she tried to have the second child reveals some personal complexities, however. Eleven years after having her first child and shortly after moving to a new flat Aniela decided she was ready to become a mother once again. Her husband was not keen on this idea. This is how Aniela became pregnant:

... when we finally had our own new flat, my husband, in turn, wasn't that keen. So, I used a trick, and I got pregnant, but I had a miscarriage. My husband was angry that I got pregnant, how could I, without discussing it with him ... I had the miscarriage when I was 34 years old, and I was very angry at my husband, because he didn't want to have a child, and he was angry with me that it happened without his knowledge. But, I really wanted to have a daughter, very, very much ... I vomited this miscarried pregnancy at my husband; I told him that it happened because he didn't want it. A bit psychological manoeuvre ... although I knew it wasn't true. But, I guess, it gave him something to think about ...

This extract is an excellent example of how Aniela's relations with her husband are played out in reality as opposed to the picture that she draws elsewhere in her narrative. Her husband was described initially as an 'incredibly intelligent' and 'smart person', 'like an encyclopaedia', whom she loved very much 'for his wisdom, for his great sense of humour, and for the fact that I still discover new things about him'. She highlighted the fact that she never regretted marrying him, and would never divorce him. The relationship with the husband formed a great part of Aniela's narrative, which in turn also captures tensions and complexities and hopes and fears of being a woman, a wife and a mother. When analysing the way Aniela describes the childcare responsibilities in her house, a clear division of roles appears:

... it was similar for both children ... I was responsible for care. When they were small it was all my responsibility to take care of them ... and my husband? He just wasn't there; it was all my responsibility, all on my shoulders – work, the house and children ... and ... my husband would rather take care of his work.

Aniela's reflection on her husband's role in the family portrays him in a blurred, hazy way - someone who is 'just not there' and thus he does not play any significant role in the daily running of the family. Such a positioning of her husband implies that his professional work was possibly perceived (by herself and her husband) as more important than hers, even though she also worked full-time. He is positioned as the primary 'breadwinner'. This conforms to hegemonic constructions of the work place, which might be a feature of the post-communist neoliberal context of Poland. Aniela's use of the word 'rather' when speaking about her husband suggests a degree of choice held by her husband and his

preference towards work instead of sharing childcare and household responsibilities. In contrast, Aniela could be seen as being left with little choice regarding the childcare as she had already assumed full responsibility from when their children were small because this was something that was expected from her at that time. But there are further complexities in her narrative and elsewhere as Aniela reflects on the power distribution in her marriage:

... in my judgement his work was more significant than mine... My husband's culinary skills equal zero, his laundry skills—zero, his cleaning skills—zero, he has been created for the 'higher' purposes in this life, and I understand that [laughs] ... I've never competed with my husband for the position in our relationship, so for the peace of mind he was the, supposedly, more 'clever' person in the family, because he could afford that, and I was this person ... who takes care ... of his clean shirt. And I'm quite happy in this aspect that I didn't have to be this stronger personality in our relationship, even though I know I could be. But then, it would require much more sacrifice from me, so the position I have is much more convenient ... I'm happy that I'm a woman, because a woman can do more, she can be silly, I can be silly, I don't care, but I will still achieve what I want, I don't have to be the cleverest one, I can be 'blonde' as long as there is a result.

Aniela weaved a complex plot where the layers of contentedness ('I'm happy'; 'the position I have is more convenient') and control ('I don't have to'; 'I know I could be'; 'I understand'; 'I don't care'; 'I will achieve what I want') are voiced alongside the layers of gendered stereotyping where she positions herself as being able to play 'blonde' and 'be silly'. This is apparently adequate to serve as an explanation as to why her husband's domestic skills 'equal zero': he is the 'stronger personality' and someone who 'has been created for the higher purposes in this life'. Aniela indeed refers to her husband's work as 'more significant' than hers – both within and outside the home realm. Aniela implies that she takes control of the way the power is distributed in her relationship by asserting that it is her judgement that is to be regarded and implying that it is her own 'wisdom' and 'mindfulness' that informs such opinion. Her comment that it makes her 'happy' and that she 'allowed' her husband to be the 'stronger personality' and be the 'clever person', whose work can be considered as 'more significant' is indicative of an attitude that demonstrates using agency in ways which presuppose passivity and yet in fact are powerful. Aniela employed tactics (using the expression 'supposedly more clever' with regard to her husband) that enabled her to position herself in her narrative as the competent wife, someone who deep down is cleverer than her husband. She supposes that as a woman she has to make more sacrifices (indicating that she already makes them) to prove that she is more clever, she 'consciously' decides to use her knowledge in another way – to step down into a caricature as 'blonde' and allow her husband to take the position of the clever one. Aniela positioned herself very firmly within the mould of a 'brave victim'. Throughout her narrative she tries

to make sense of her double-burden (work/mother) by claiming authority over the way the relations and responsibilities were negotiated in her family. This ultimately reinforces the traditionally held division of labour in the public/private sphere. Aniela's practices are supported by the findings of the study undertaken by Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk that many Polish women during communist times actively shaped an identity of a 'brave victim' and did indeed gain a sense of 'real authority in the private sphere' through their sacrifice (2000:163).

Further contradictions appear in Aniela's discussion regarding the shifting experience of motherhood in Poland. There is no strong sense of any major difference in Aniela's experiences as a mother in the communist era and during the (early) transformation, except for the fact that she had to re-train to secure employment after having her second child. She does highlight the fact that she was able to stay at home longer after having her second child but this was not a result of the transformation, but rather a consequence of the changes on the legislative level during the communist era that were still in place. It is during the time when Aniela speaks about the changes in Poland prompted by the transformation that she starts comparing different groups of women in their experiences as mothers and brings up the idea of Matka Polka. Aniela refers to the myth of Matka Polka and distances herself very vigorously from it, revealing some internal conflict:

Matka Polka ... it's a woman who makes sacrifices. I for instance don't feel like Matka Polka. I feel like a woman. Because, you see, women do sacrifice themselves ... they somehow accommodate themselves to the man they marry, then they have children ... and they bend over backwards for the kids, and that's their love. I'm not like that.

In the account above Aniela positions herself in clear opposition to her interpretation of the self-sacrificing Matka Polka. Aniela implies that such suffocating attributes disregard the identity of a woman. Yet, later during her interview Aniela comments: 'I'm not like that, I give a lot, I'm ready to sacrifice'.

Aniela apparently willingly supports her husband's career and is happy being the one 'ironing the shirts' because she regards her husband's paid work as 'more significant'. She reinforces the stereotype that women achieve what they want through other methods. Elsewhere in her narrative she also speaks about the gender relations in her family:

When I come back from work – the family is obviously hungry – so I get the dinner. My husband tries to help me so it's ready earlier. His usual task is to peel the potatoes but then sometimes his attitude kills me. We go to work, it's early in the morning, we sit in the car, I'm still half asleep and he asks me whether he will need to peel the potatoes in the afternoon! For God's sake! I'm thinking about

missing the meeting with the personnel manager, because I'm already late, and he asks about potatoes! [laughs] ... anyway, we eat dinner ... I wash the dishes ... Then, a moment for a nap, maybe an hour or so; when I wake up I do some housework, like a bit of cleaning or shopping for food, and then the evening comes. I go to bed quite late, I like the atmosphere in the house when everybody is asleep, and I feel almost like I'm alone, and then I remember all the things that I should do, usually in the kitchen, some cooking for the next day or at least some preparation. And that's the end of my day.

Aniela portrays her husband as someone who is rather 'immature' with his problems about peeling potatoes while she has far more important things in her head (how to avoid being spotted arriving late at work). But, later in her interview Aniela comments:

There should be a partnership in each family. A man's role should be to be a partner for a wife.

Yet, she recognises that often 'things' are different to how 'it should be':

But, unfortunately, there are still remnants of the communism, that's the heritage we've been left – a man is the centre of the family, and a wife is there to provide food and sex so he can be satisfied and get drunk whenever he wants ... but it should be a partnership.

She then hurriedly distances herself from this reality adding,

I have a good arrangement.

She concludes with a powerful comment on her husband being capable of 'chauvinistic moments':

However, even my very well educated husband sometimes has his chauvinistic moments; you can't see that openly, but it's horrible sometimes, this rudeness, this attitude; 'I'll show you ... and that's the way it must be ...' but I always tried to fight that, I try not to cross certain lines, because I think that even an argument should give you something new, maybe something to learn. But, yes, it happens. Especially with regard to our sex life, again, it's the remnants of communism that says when man needs, you must give ... but at the end of the day, we each have each other and we have to negotiate things.

The practices of reflexivity intertwined in the above extracts clearly point to the increasing self-awareness that Aniela was experiencing during her interview. This reflexivity enables her to present herself as someone who has agentic power. Whilst she rejects the interpretations of Matka Polka, she nevertheless acknowledges that the attributes of womanhood defined by the myth are in keeping with her own experiences. This acceptance emerges through the changing threads in her narrative: from a seemingly modern woman

(‘there should be a partnership in each family’, ‘I have a good arrangement’) to an accommodating wife (‘I’m ready to sacrifice’, ‘a wife is there to provide food and sex’). The layers in Aniela’s narrative provide a good example of how elements of myth can be both rejected and yet still intertwined across narrative. Aniela draws upon definitions of the Matka Polka myth first rejecting it, then using it, then reshaping it from many different angles. She distances herself from it; she vocally opposes it; and ultimately unwittingly finishes with reinforcing her status with the very traditional views and perceptions the myth ascribes to women and their gendered roles. What Aniela’s case reveals is that the production of a narrative is both actively constructed but also locally constrained (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000:104). Whilst Aniela narrates a sense of self as an individual (and in control), the ways in which she makes sense of her experiences are profoundly influenced by social discourses and practices. In this case the myth of Matka Polka called for obedience, submission, and disregard for one’s own individual needs. These extracts demonstrate that the ability for self-reflexivity is always shaped and produced within the particular circumstances which pattern our gendered lives (Miller, 2005).

Aniela’s case study has provided an opportunity to examine possible changes and continuities within one’s individual experiences. Her (special) case of a mother, whose children were born in two different eras, enabled to trace her capacities as an individual to exercise choice and control at home and in relation to her body. Without many significant differences between her experiences of being a mother in the communist and post-communist era, the continuities that transpired highlighted the fact that Aniela entered the newly democratised Poland with her identity forged in the communist era. As the ‘brave victim’ she continued to operationalise her agency in ways that imply submission and passivity yet have powerful outcomes for the way Aniela was able to present herself as a woman, a mother and a worker who is competent and in control of her life. This way she epitomised Matka Polka as someone who despite claims of self-awareness and autonomy, in fact lived her gendered life often experiencing what can be seen as inequality within the home realm and sacrificed herself to the family’s life and her husband’s career.

Aleksandra

Aleksandra’s case study is very compelling because her narrative is deeply complex and full of tensions. It is also beautifully narrated, and there is a certain competence in the way Alexandra narrated her experiences as a mother, wife and a woman living in Poland after

1989. This case study is also particularly clear example of how the interview situation facilitates the opportunity for self-reflexivity. Aleksandra was 48 years old, married and had three children when I met her. She had a son and a daughter born closely after one another as she got pregnant with the second child while the first one was only 6 months old; five years later Aleksandra became a mother to another daughter. At the time of the interview the children were aged 23, 22 and 16 years. These early experiences of being a mother to two very small children shaped Aleksandra's life in significant ways. Throughout her narrative she refers to that period as 'a black spot in her memory', as she had not envisaged that motherhood could be so difficult and draining both physically and mentally. On the one hand, this experience served as a point of reference for her when presenting herself as an invested mother, 'a clucking hen', who by nature loved and cared for children and found fulfilment in motherhood. On the other hand, it was also a time when she felt she was 'burned out', sad and depressed because she tried to do everything herself without any help. This selfless devotion was 'in her personality' and took her to the point of making herself dangerously ill. These negative sides of her early motherhood were her cause of distress as she thought she had betrayed her motherly nature by 'losing her nerve and shouting', feeling angry and depressed. In Aleksandra's account this is something she perceives as a 'weakness' and she is very ashamed of it. As a young woman Aleksandra had taken a course to become a catechist and taught children for a while. This experience also impacts on her later life as the religion became a designator of her values and priorities:

I have my own hierarchy: God, husband, children ... that's how I think it should be ... first there is God, and we derive our strength and happiness from him, he helps us ... then, you know, before you have children, you are a married couple, we give love to each other, and now, I know as a wife, that if there is a conflict between me and my husband my children also suffer from it, right? If there is peace and love between a couple then they have a stronger and healthier love for their children. This love for children is in you and always will be, but the children are, in your married life, like visitors, they come and then they go, but you still stay together ... So, it's worth to work on your marriage, so it's always alive and develops.

Her religious views also shape her attitude towards birth control methods and she only uses natural contraception and dismisses any ideas of abortion. Aleksandra is prepared to become a mother again sometime in her later life.

When talking about the past and the transformation, Aleksandra's assertion is that the changes were inextricably linked with the religious sphere. She says that the Church had lost its meaning and relevance in people's lives and she actually criticised its political involvement: a common theme amongst many of the women interviewed. In recollecting the

past, Aleksandra recalls her impression of an overwhelming pressure pervading the public discourse of a 'you must' approach. She felt people were coerced into participating in the various party-run events and pressed into taking up various memberships in state-owned organisations and establishments. Similarly to Aniela, she described the times as full of greyness and sadness. From a maternal point of view, however, she recognised the benefits offered by the state which she considered to have been a great support for the family, for example the subsidised holiday camps for children, parcels distributed to children around Christmas and other events for children and families that were subsidised (as well as childcare).

Aleksandra worked as an accountant for seven years before becoming a mother. Once she had her children she decided to spend all of her time with them, gave up professional work completely, and devoted her entire life to her family. She was one of only two participants who decided to stay at home after having children. In her account Alexandra describes in detail the feelings of ecstasy and happiness after giving birth to her first child. She then justifies her unusual (at the time) decision to put motherhood first by citing the good financial situation of the family:

I wasn't even planning to go back to work, because ... my husband opened his own business, and we ... were fine, and also for me, this motherhood, it was something so ... I remember when I gave birth to my first child, after twenty four hours I realised that my face muscles were aching, and only when I looked into the mirror I realised that I was smiling all that time, I was so happy... to the point that I started producing milk almost straight away, when normally it only happens on the third day after you give birth. But, I was so ecstatic that everything was just bursting in me. So, I didn't want to go back to work at all, I just really wanted to stay at home and take care of my children.

In her (almost) idealised version of giving birth Aleksandra portrays herself as a naturally happy woman who was able to make a choice to devote her life to her children: 'we were fine [financially]', 'I just really wanted to stay at home'. Throughout her account she positions herself as a contented woman for whom mothering has been the key role. She presents herself and her identity in relation to being a caring mother. She happily states that her personality would not allow anyone else to look after her children. She thinks it is impossible to separate her mothering from herself as a person. Her devotion and involvement in childcare means, as she says, that she could never follow what was happening in politics or the social life of the country. With hindsight, in Aleksandra's view this had been one of the negative aspects of becoming a full-time mother and she touched on it several times during our meeting. The lack of value from the state and the society attached to the work she had done in caring for her children and undertaking domestic chores had

been weaved throughout her narrative, and on many occasions Aleksandra is almost apologetic when referring to the fact that she is 'only' a housewife. She says that it is only since her children have grown up that she has learned to enjoy the little pleasures of life without feeling guilty. One of those pleasures was getting enough sleep. She notes that for a very long time she felt that staying in bed a bit longer inferred she was lazy. She feels a sense of discontent about the work she does at home as she reflects on her experiences and weaves a complicated narrative in which she can be seen to justify her situation and try to make sense of her family-centred life. It is important here to disentangle the maternal from the domestic care, as for Aleksandra the fact that she was a full-time mother appeared as something she truly cherished and 'loved' doing. Yet, as her work within the home realm 'naturally' extended to the domestic chores it was this element of her work that she strongly felt was taken for granted and 'invisible'.

In her essentialist narrative Aleksandra meticulously describes her day, listing every detail:

After all those years when I was dreaming about getting enough sleep, and I thought that I will never get it, finally I can now say that I sleep enough. So following my biological clock I get up between 9 and 10am, I have my breakfast and I do a little tidying up; I have to confess that I really like cleanliness and order so I try to keep it that way; and then around lunch time I put the dishwasher on, and my favourite: the two washing machines start working too. I have to say that I think I like doing the laundry because it's something noticeable, you know, a human being feels a sense of satisfaction if you can see your accomplishment. With the cleaning, the family doesn't really see that ... We have one day a week when we all have areas to clean at home, but I do the daily work anyway, because I just like us living in a clean environment. I will also do some hoovering if required. I also think about the shopping that needs to be done and once in a while I drive to do the shopping ... And, well, then I wait for my children. When they come home I feed them and then they take over the household responsibilities;they actively participate in whatever needs to be done. It's not that they come in and I run around them like a servant. Then, in the evening, when it gets quieter, I have an hour or two to discuss with my husband issues, which we don't want to talk about around the children. And that's it, my ordinary day, maybe it doesn't seem busy but for me it's packed with tasks. You know, I always say that they are simple, primitive tasks that I do every day, but ... I think I say that only because every woman around me – my sisters-in-law and all my girlfriends – they all work professionally, and when we start to talk about that they always say that they work so hard and are all so busy and well I ... I have been working very hard too.

Aleksandra's narrative starts with a very positive and personally fulfilling account of housework ('I really like cleanliness and order,' 'my favourite: the two washing machines start working,' 'I just like us living in a clean environment'). She makes the point that most of her housework is 'invisible' and 'unappreciated'. This reflects the views of many of the other women interviewed. In contrast to Aleksandra these other women provided this lack of recognition and appreciation of their domestic and caring work as the reason why they

sought paid work outside the home realm: the societal view being that paid work is more valuable than house work. Interestingly, at the end of this part of her narrative Aleksandra is comfortable confirming that she downplays her work at home ('simple, primitive tasks that I do every day'), noting that this is because all the women around her work professionally. Aleksandra, however, is different to her female friends who are employed as her work in the home defines how she sees herself and she appears to gain personal satisfaction and fulfilment from the role. Aleksandra is also careful to point out that the housework is not her exclusive domain: 'they [children] take over the household responsibilities'. She is not the 'servant' in her family. This indicates how social norms can shape one's sense of self by prescribing local understandings of gendered identities. The idealised model of the 'working mother' that Aleksandra herself is interested in claiming still significantly influences her self-perceptions and self-evaluations. Aleksandra in the extract above concludes by asserting her own version of 'hard work'. The practices of reflexivity continue when she moves on to paid work:

I can only see positive aspects of working on something other than your house and children ... I personally think that women are created in a way that by nature, they 'feel' the children and the atmosphere of the home hearth, but in order to develop oneself, then yes, professional work is good ... if I may, I would advise every woman to go to work if she has that opportunity, and not just sit at home ... if I were to live my life over again ... I would definitely try to work professionally ... for my mental wellbeing ... These days, as I have more time, since doing the house stuff doesn't take that long, I've started keeping financial documentation of our business ... in order to have a break, to relax from those house chores that can be stupefying ... I don't really need to do that for financial reasons, I just do it for myself ... [when you don't work professionally] it brings a sort of emptiness to your intellectual life and like myself for instance, I have to really motivate myself because you slowly turn illiterate ... I feel like that, really ... and it distresses me a bit, I think it's my biggest distress actually, I feel sorry for myself ... I can see that all the women around me have proper lives, you know, they have children obviously, but they also have their worlds, professional work, not just in the house like me...that's really frustrating. To be honest, I think that all the other women should be really proud that they have managed to have both ... I didn't.

Juxtaposing these extracts highlights the contradictions within Aleksandra's account. At the beginning of the interview she admits that she did not want to go back to work after having children because she was economically secure (because of her husband's business) and so could make the decision to stay at home. However, during the course of her interview she shifts the way she positioned her role in the home and her views about paid work. Her initial and rather low estimation of paid work (when she highlights that she 'didn't want to work at all') implies that Aleksandra had previously considered paid work as simply a source of financial income. Yet as the interview progresses she arrives at a point where she voices her frustrations about the lack of appreciation, the niggling social pressures and the personal

stagnation that downplayed her work as a stay-at-home mother – and readily admits to perpetuating such views too. She admits a mother can only escape these ‘stupefying’ chores by taking work outside the home realm.

Throughout her narrative Aleksandra accepts that the decisions she made during the communist past were not necessarily best for her as an individual. Reflecting on her experiences from the current context of her life shaped by the promises and possibilities provided by neoliberal discourses, which highlight the importance of individuality, later in her story she remarks about ‘doing things differently’ if given her time over again. Aleksandra reveals that although she is a devoted and a happy mother she has actually come to realise that working outside the home realm serves a much greater purpose than financial reward in terms of what is valued. She now seeks to be valued beyond the home realm through the ‘paper work’ she does for her husband and asserts that this is for her ‘mental wellbeing’. She now acknowledges that having a professional life can enrich one’s intellectual life. The focus on Aleksandra’s intellectual status introduced another story. She was happy to point out to me that the interview situation itself made her evaluate her own aptitude and wanted reassurance that the way she expressed herself was ‘up to my (academic) standards’. This highlights the consequences of ‘prompted’ reflexivity and the reciprocal links between the researcher and the participants. As already shown, Aleksandra’s self evaluation had already devalued her status as a career stay-at-home mother. The interview process and its tendency to encourage further self-reflexivity seemed to deepen her level of despondency. There is clearly a point of risk when the influence of the researcher is in danger of violating academic rigour in the interview situation. In Aleksandra’s case the interview prompted reflexivity and in this she felt compelled to present herself in a particular way. In fact, her insecurity was more self deprecation than anything founded in reality as there was nothing flawed with her use of language or the intellectual content and coherence of her narrated experiences.

So Aleksandra, like Aniela, employs specific tactics and devices to negotiate the gendered experiences at home. Aleksandra’s relationship with her husband was influenced by a mix of factors such as the literature she read before she got married, her faith and her continuously amassed experience of everyday life. Her preconceptions defining the model of a competent wife also played a central role in constructing a part of Aleksandra’s self:

... sometimes what is important for a woman seems to be trivial for a man. It also translates to the home sphere. Many women, I know because I speak with my girlfriends about this, do all the chores at home themselves, you know, with the attitude ‘I can cope with it myself’. Then, they are angry and frustrated, because a man doesn’t appreciate something she did, and she feels like she is a heroin

managing everything herself. I've always tried not to be like that and to encourage my husband to participate in everything I did. I didn't really want to gain his admiration and appreciation for my ability to cope with managing the whole house, no, I rather tried to push him gently into doing things with me.

Aleksandra criticises the idea of the self-sacrificing woman, preferring to encourage her husband to share household responsibilities. In behaving as the wise and adroit wife she positions herself, at least figuratively, as the 'queen' of her realm. Aleksandra distances herself mentally from many of the other women around her and seeks to demonstrate her control in aspects of her married life. However, other elements of her narrative contradict this positioning:

Obviously, since I'm at home we have duties divided between us; he is responsible for earning the money and I take care of the house.

Aleksandra cares about the lack of recognition for her work at home and the absence of paid work that she feels is missing from her life. These two features clearly link with the feminist struggle so why does Aleksandra criticise the liberated and emancipated women 'who are so independent' as hypocritical by asserting that 'every woman needs a man'? Demonstrating the frustration that colours her narrative as she tries to make sense of her own route through life, Aleksandra later voices admiration for the women who 'can achieve something in their lives'. Once again, Aleksandra devalues her work at home as she contemplates herself alongside the working women whom she perceives as successful:

... generally, in life, there is give and take ... if a woman achieves success in a professional life, it happens, for sure, that it damages some aspect of motherhood and family life. If someone, like me, devotes one's self to family life then it feels like something is missing ... the continuity of professional life ... it brings a sort of emptiness to your intellectual life.

Aleksandra's narrative has layers within layers and exposes levels of complexity, contradiction and tension that repeatedly appear throughout her account. Here is a woman who has devoted her life to the caring for her family and yet remains unfulfilled and frustrated, an account full of inconsistencies and intricacies that confirm the difficulties of narrating 'self' (Miller, 2007; Andrews, 2000). Aleksandra's case study reveals how specific social and cultural ideals on womanhood persist. Alexandra became a full-time mother at a time when the communist concept of a 'socialist individual' presupposed active participation in the labour force. For women it defined the double-burden of womanhood and motherhood. Despite seemingly privileged position of someone with a 'choice' during the times when that choice was often severely circumscribed for many others, Aleksandra's case

illuminates how the materiality of her life has been shaped by the ideology concerned with issues of national and religious interests. The models of womanhood defined during the communist era, which enmeshed production with reproduction, had actually underprivileged Aleksandra because she was unable to fit the promoted model. It is in the contemporary post-communist frame, where individualisation plays a central part in how individual lives are understood and conceptualised, that Aleksandra is able to disentangle from the collective responsibility towards the state and reflexively assess the 'give and take' of a woman's life. In weaving aspects of individuality, she acknowledges the importance of a life outside of 'those house chores that can be stupefying'. Yet, it is the continued social pressures, dominant public discourses and the historically defined cultural definitions of 'appropriate' Polish womanhood that result in Aleksandra producing a narrative that is full of complexities and contradictions.

I have demonstrated that for my specific group of women the role model of a coping working mother epitomises what it means to be a Polish woman. For Aleksandra, the concept of the coping mother became the major cause of anguish despite her relatively privileged and comfortable position of a fulfilled mother and a wife. Despite the subsequent transformation and cultural shifts, the aspirations of mothers still adhere to some dominant Polish cultural archetypes whose social pressures remain unchanged.

Conclusions

The analyses in this chapter offer a more nuanced understanding of how the contradictions and conflicts produced in narratives can together present a coherent and 'recognisable' account of a self (Miller, 2005). This illuminates the duality of selves, where the temporal character of self construction that takes place during the narration facilitates coherence but at the same time accounts for change (Ricoeur, 1991; McNay, 2000). The culturally prevailing model of a working mother that encapsulated a seemingly appropriate and emancipative womanhood played an important part in Aniela's and Aleksandra's attempts at constructing coherent accounts. These two case studies illuminate the representations that shaped women's lives during the communist era. For both women the role model of the coping mother turned out to be a pivotal aspect of their lives. For Aniela, the construction of Matka Polka, although only occasionally mentioned in her interview, seems to have significant influence on her definitions of herself. For Aleksandra, the fact that she did not subscribe to the iconic figure of the coping working mother became a source of visceral discontent. What

equally shaped both accounts were the power relations within the family and home sphere. Both women bore the responsibility of caring for children and home, both women presented themselves as competent and wise wives and both women claimed power over the dynamics of their family lives. The secrecy and guile with which each woman influenced their respective husbands supports the findings of Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2000) discussed in Chapter 2. The identity of the 'brave victim' theorised by Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2000) was assumed by the women living their lives in the communist times offering them an opportunity to make sense of what often amounted to inequality and discrimination but was counteracted with informal power negotiations that attempted to redress the traditional patriarchal family structure. For Aniela and Aleksandra, being the 'brave victim' might indeed be seen as allowing for a sense of authority and control over their arrangements within the family.

The case study analysis in this chapter captured specific continuities and changes in the narrative constructions. The continuities in these two women's lives exposed how durable representations of femininities continue to shape some women's understanding of their social roles. The changes, prompted by the post-communist transformation and the democratic values attached to individual choice, offered the women an opportunity to reflexively assess their lives and position themselves not only as self-sacrificing mothers but also as individuals who, as they felt, could now present themselves in particular ways. For Aniela, this was through the image of an emancipated, happy and 'great woman' that she presented at the time of the interview. For Aleksandra, it took place when she retrospectively evaluated her life coming to terms with the fact that whatever 'choice' a woman would make it would always and almost certainly carry compromises. What this analysis allows to illuminate theoretically is the shifting yet continuous dynamics of the power relations, gender and constructions of selves that discipline and influence individual lives in various and obdurate ways.

The following chapter investigates the narratives of Kasia and Magda: the mothers of the post-communist era.

Chapter 7

Case Studies - The Mothers of the Post-Communist Era

Introduction

This chapter focuses on two particular case studies. Each was chosen because in specific ways it allows for continuities and changes to be illuminated and addressed in an intergenerational comparison. Each of the women in the study became a mother after the collapse of the communist system and their narratives demonstrate specific personal struggles and contradictions. My analysis of these narratives is focused upon the women's experiences of motherhood in order to explore in a more detailed way the construction of the 'New Polish Woman' as put forward in the work of Seibert (2001). Seibert purports that the 'New Polish Woman' has evolved as a contemporary form of womanhood in Poland in the post-communist era. This version of womanhood 'shows women as modern, sexually liberated and independent' but at the same time upholds the demands towards women's reproduction and production (Seibert, 2001:273). I therefore argue here that in fact this novel representation is not a new concept offering Polish women a new and alternative identity but only a more glamorised and revamped version of the traditional concept of the Polish coping mother. The case study subjects have been given the pseudonyms Kasia and Magda. I explore how they constructed their identities as mothers, how the practices of reflexivity were captured through the process of narrative construction of selves, and how their experiences illuminate the shifting contexts and durable ideals in their lives as mothers when compared with the older cohort. I chose these examples to specifically demonstrate both intergenerational shifts and continuities: Kasia, like Aleksandra in the previous chapter, had been a stay-at-home mother and similarly struggled with the feeling that she had not fulfilled a particular version of Polish womanhood when judged in the context of her peer group. Magda's interview, in contrast, serves as an example of a narrative in which examples of some shifts in gender roles within the home can be seen. Magda's own contradictions also expose the gender constraints in terms of the way she was able, or not, to negotiate her role towards what she referred to as being a 'modern mum'. Together, the two cases highlight the wider struggles experienced by mothers burdened by work and motherhood that this thesis explores and theorises. The data presented shed light on how the representations of the 'New

Polish Woman' appeared in the accounts of the participants as a relevant and novel identity option for women in post-1989 Poland.

I chose Kasia's interview as a case study because of the way her narrative unfolded. She was the only stay-at-home mother amongst the younger generation and, in what appeared as a controlled and well managed account, positioned herself as a devoted and fulfilled mother, one of the lucky ones who does not need to get up early and hurry to work, who does not neglect her children (by letting them run loose with their own house keys whilst the parents are at work) and ultimately as one who is truly privileged because of her spacious house, secure financial position and prospects of having her own business once she decides to work professionally. But, by the end of the interview she also exposed her own insecurities about her status as a stay-at-home mother. In what she thought others saw as 'too long', 'too devoted' and 'too narrow', Kasia appeared to feel compelled to defend her role as a full-time mother. This illuminates the pressure Kasia felt of not being able to match what she understood as the dominant cultural representation of 'proper' womanhood: the idealised construction of Matka Polka who is able to combine mothering with paid work.

The case study of Magda exemplifies, amongst the younger cohort, someone whose sense of self and identity corresponds to the 'New Polish Woman'. Even so, Magda experiences day-to-day difficulties in trying to live up to the ideals enshrined in this construction. Particularly the elements that correspond with the concept of the coping mother, and which, ultimately are the pivotal elements of the 'New Polish Woman', became a challenge to how Magda tried to present herself as the 'modern mum'. Her case provides an important example of how popularly assumed, stereotypical motherhood is constructed and regarded in post-communist Poland. More significantly, Magda's case, like Aniela's from the older cohort, is representative of the few women who dismissed the model of Matka Polka as having any relevance to their lives. Yet in what unfolds in the analysis of Magda's case is that she clearly struggles with living up to the ideas and ideals embedded in this powerful myth. Her degree level education and secure job give her a privileged position in society. She is living in the capital city with easy access to healthcare and childcare. Magda is the so called economic 'winner' of the post-communist transformation (Jasiecki, 2005; Domański, 2004). Magda presents herself as a 'modern mum'. She says she successfully combines mothering and paid work because of her ability to travel freely and independently for her work whilst leaving her baby with her husband. Her experiences within the home realm were far removed from those of her own mother. Yet, the close analysis of this case reveals struggles similar to those experienced by the mothers from the older cohort. Despite presenting her husband as an involved and competent father, Magda at times reveals that she feels exploited

and undervalued. In spite of her treasured individuality she also talks of feelings of inequality and acquiescence when referring to the uneven burden of childcare responsibilities she shoulders when compared to her husband. Thus, whilst according to the neoliberal discourse of the market narrative she was able to take advantage of the free market opportunities and became the 'liberated worker', she simultaneously had to struggle with the demands of the maternal work just as her mother did. This case study exposes how political, economic, social and cultural changes have affected women's lives but also illuminates how this socio-economic context has yet to ameliorate, assimilate and encapsulate motherhood. This underlines my argument that the 'novel' image of womanhood, the 'New Polish Woman', continues to embed obdurate values and ideas linked with culturally conditioned notions of femininities.

Both these case studies reveal one further important fact: the power relations within the families and the home sphere of the younger cohort link directly to similar themes apparent in the case studies of the older cohort. This was apparent in Kasia's case through the traditionally defined role division at home and indirectly through the way her almost entire interview was narrated by the plural form 'we' - representing Kasia and her husband. In Magda's case, the unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities was voiced with frustration despite initially presenting her husband as a competent and involved father.

Kasia

Kasia's family can be seen to represent (the new) middle class in post-communist Poland: they own the house in which they live in an affluent suburban area, have two cars, send their daughters to various privately-run afternoon classes, and can afford for Kasia to stay at home and care for the family. At the time when I met Kasia she was 32 years old, was living in the suburbs of Kołobrzeg, was married and had three children. She described herself as growing up in a Catholic family and believed that it was important to take guidance on 'how to live your life and be a better person' from the Church. She declared that religion had always been in her life and formed an important part of her self-awareness. Despite planning to go to university, Kasia got married shortly after graduation from a college of tourism, and in 4-yearly intervals became a mother to three girls—a conscious decision which Kasia and her husband took in order to be financially able to send all their daughters to eventually study at university. At the time of the interview Kasia had been a stay-at-home mother for 12 years having only worked as an apprentice during her final year at college. The narrative she

presented is of a life that was planned and managed. However, despite her assertion of being in control of her life certain complexities within her narrative are striking. On several occasions Kasia identified herself as Matka Polka and recognisable aspects of Matka Polka are threaded through her narrative. The following excerpt was offered at the outset of Kasia's mothering account:

... with the first child, it's a big event, you are so conscientious about everything and so worried, and you check things millions of times ... with the second one it's better, because you already have much more experience, and with the third one - you feel like Matka Polka.

Kasia is a stay-at-home mother and the role division in the home is traditional. She cares for the children taking them to and from schools, prepares food for the whole family, helps the two older girls (aged 12 and 8) with the homework and plays with the youngest (4 years old). She generally does all the domestic work linked with running the house including shopping, cleaning, laundry, etc. Her husband works in a big shipping company, runs a small private business on the side, and often travels for business. The social status of the family comes through plainly on several occasions when Kasia justifies the fact of having three children and not working outside the home. She says: 'we wanted to have a big family, especially as we have this huge house', 'we have a three floor house so we have very good housing conditions and the finances are not bad', 'I don't work, the situation doesn't force me to', 'what is important is that the children need to be taken to and from their schools and minded'. Kasia's apparently casual attitude towards money ('things like money are not that important in life') and her musing on potential work outside the home are indicative of the relatively comfortable financial situation of the family: 'my working would be more to widen my horizons rather than for the sake of earning money'; 'I think about work, a business that I could manage; maybe we will build a B&B and I would supervise that'. Similarly, a financially secure upbringing has also shaped Kasia's experiences of communist times. When reflecting back on her childhood Kasia remembers her mother queuing for toilet paper which was rationed and her father's income as a fisherman providing the family with a life unaffected by poverty, but which also shows that even financially comfortable situation did not guarantee an ability to acquire goods in this period:

We didn't suffer from poverty; I didn't see that in my house. My father was a fisherman. I remember that we had quite a good life during those times. My father sometimes would bring some dollars, because they would sail to Bornholm [Danish island], and he would sell the fish there and be paid in dollars, so you know, it wasn't bad, and then we would go to these special shops called PEWEX, where you could buy things from the West for dollars. So, my sister and me, we would get these tops that we were dreaming of, and we could then show off that we have clothes from PEWEX, or sweets, we would buy some tic-tac's or

chewing gum... So, this whole communism, I don't recall it as something horrible, like poverty. My dad wasn't involved in any politics so we weren't engendered in this matter either. My mum says today that she preferred her life back then rather than today; she says that her life was better under communism, my dad was earning good money and it was good.

In the newly diversified post-communist reality, Kasia and her husband would be located in the category of economic 'winners' of the transformation. But the above extract exposes another important aspect of the transformation: the complexities of people's lives in Poland prior to 1989. As Anita Seibert has argued in her work on Polish women and the transformation, the social structure during the communist era was not uniform and the economic and social conditions of people's lives were still varied and different albeit regulated and camouflaged (2001:3). Hence, in spite of the general perception that people's lives were lived according to a 'common plot' (Weiner, 2007:24), inequalities and stratification also existed in the communist era. So, whilst Kasia's family did not suffer greatly during the previous system, in her evaluation of changes brought about by the transformation, Kasia appreciates the 'normality' that she and her children are now able to experience. She labelled herself as belonging to the 'transition generation' indicating that the effects of the transformation, perhaps not always positive in her view, are still visible and she hopes that 'everything will be sorted out' by the time her children become adults. In her evaluation of womanhood in post-communist Poland Kasia highlights two features that are a reflection on her life: education and money. She comments that it is much harder for women in the labour market if they lack a good education and other desirable skills. In her view, not only did everyone have a job in the communist era, the value placed on abilities was also different. Work and a professional career, according to Kasia, were perceived differently to how they are today. Today 'one must prove oneself, be really good at many things and have lots of knowledge'. Kasia, in contrast, thought it was much easier to be a mother today than in the communist era. According to her, the only advantage one needs today to be a better parent is sufficient money. This of course stands in stark contrast to her earlier statements that money is not important and considering Kasia has three children taking a sizeable portion of the income, the implication is that in her mind as long as there is 'enough', from whatever source, further money will not necessarily improve the wellbeing of the family. It could be interpreted as the luxury of a 'winners' perspective.

The internal shifts in Kasia's narrative continue when one scrutinises her account of family life. Almost the entire interview was narrated in the plural form. Whenever Kasia was talking about her children, home or family she always spoke on behalf of herself and her

husband. The following excerpts are representative of what seemed to be narrations of an older person where ideas of individualism had not been a feature:

That's how *we* planned it: when the first one will be graduating *we* will send the second one. So, *we* can cope financially.

We favour a family model where the children are together with the parents.
We like to have a good contact with our children.

We have this philosophy that as long as they want they will be travelling with us. Not, like some other parents, I can see, that they leave the children with the grandparents, and go alone somewhere abroad, *we* don't do that. When *we* go out, *we* go together, and these trips are more for them than for us, *we* don't sightsee the things that *we* would like, no, *we* do things that the girls would enjoy, *we* are there for them.

... for the time being *we* are devoting ourselves completely to them.

Kasia spoke at length in this shared style about her family, which in some way is indicative of regarding the family as a joint enterprise more than solely the mother's work. In some ways it seems to be a family as a project rather than an accepted 'natural' part of a woman's life. Perhaps this is a reflection of the 'shared' notions of the family. The excerpts above relate to her children but there were also other storylines where Kasia used 'we' to voice what actually seemed to be her individual opinions. As a result, the narrative seems very controlled. The majority of her views and attitudes are voiced from the standpoint of 'we'.⁹⁸ Kasia's husband was initially present at the beginning of the interview and although he did leave, in her narrative Kasia did not speak much about him as an individual person even if he was still clearly and persistently present in his wife's account. What this indicates is that the role division in Kasia's house is presented as very traditional on the practical level; however, it also implies a figurative reality. The individual self is lost in the greater part of Kasia's narrative and this is either due to the figurative nature of the point above or, just as poignantly, due to Kasia's own lack of self esteem. Her own identity as a woman is conflated with that of a mother and a seemingly compliant wife. The family is very child-focused and this is clear when Kasia reveals that she and her husband rarely make time for themselves as a couple to the point that their youngest daughter still sleeps in their bed:

Since the youngest one was born *we* don't go out much, and every time *we* do *we* take her with us, she even still sleeps with us ... she was really looked after that extra bit more. I breastfed her until she was two years old, and so she still sleeps in our bedroom with us, and there is no way she would leave. *We* sometimes ask her to go to her bedroom; there is no conversation about that, she says she will sleep with us forever. For now *we* are leaving it, once she is older, like the oldest daughter for instance, when I try to hug her she runs away, so for now *we* say, let's leave her sleeping with us.

In other parts of her account Kasia also speaks about how the couple have devoted themselves to their children: spending all evening playing and talking with the children, travelling only to places that are interesting for the children, not going out at all except for family celebrations and whenever they do go out it is always with all the children. Kasia positions herself as a 'good' and devoted mother, and throughout her narration presents the running of her family as a 'project'. With no other arena in which to perform except for the home sphere, complete devotion to the children currently defines her life. Still, while she draws a picture of a very family orientated couple it becomes clear elsewhere in her narrative that Kasia is not entirely jovial about the night routine (bed-sharing with the child) and she states clearly that she hopes it will change soon. These clashing positions between contradictory points in the same narrative reveal intricacies of how individuals can construct complex selves within their story. In the final part of the interview complexities in Kasia's narrative illustrate how interviewees attempt to justify conflicting emotions and experiences by falling into narrative contradictions. In the absence of any alternative to her exclusive mother-wife life script Kasia exposes her insecurities:

... as you see, throughout our whole conversation we talk about me and children and the house...that's how my life looks like ... I *devoted* my whole life completely to the children and the house ... and ... maybe *someone* ... *could think* that ... *it's bad* ... that I was too long ... with these children here, that *I didn't do anything for myself*, but ... I hope that later on it will be an advantage for my children in their lives, the amount of time I gave them ... and they will appreciate that ... and, as I said it will bring a return for them in their life ... and I ... for myself ... also, well, I can't say I didn't do anything, because, for example I was attending English classes for a year [laughs slightly]. Yes, I was studying English. This year it didn't work out for me, because they closed down the school I went to and I would have to join a new one and study the same things, so ... I've given up. Now, when I have some spare time I sometimes take books and study myself. So ... *I have some time for myself* and my hobbies ... one more year I decided to *devote* to children, and then we will think about something, about a business that I can run. Because, to go back to work, to regular work, it's too late, if you don't work for such a long time in your profession, you would need to go through many trainings and courses...

This account came as we exchanged casual remarks at the end of our meeting and Kasia, unsolicited, revisited the topic of her mothering. Kasia is clearly concerned that she might be seen by others as not doing enough by 'just' taking care of her children. This insecurity echoes the views of many other women in both cohorts who criticised the idea of full-time motherhood. In her attempt to demonstrate that she has still 'done things for herself,' despite her devotion to her children, Kasia simply perpetuates the idea that being 'just' a mother in post-transformation Poland is not enough for a woman to feel fulfilled and feel socially respected. This in turn points to the importance of presenting oneself in a positive light—not 'just' as a mother but also as someone who 'does something for oneself', which reflects

Western neoliberal value system. Significantly, in this last excerpt Kasia is not using 'we' in her narration. In fact, she is anticipating opportunities to focus on herself and pursue her own goals irrespective of her children, which clearly implies individualisation.

In the earlier parts of her narrative Kasia spoke about how she understands the concept of Matka Polka and positioned herself as one:

I always associated Matka Polka with a woman who has lots of children. I know women like that and I admire them. When my youngest daughter was still a baby I would wait in front of the school for the older one, and there was this woman, who has eight children, one of them goes with my daughter to the same group. And I spoke with her a few times, and she told me that they live very modestly but she is very proud and happy to have all these children, and every time she sees a baby she feels like she could have one more, and she said that for her not clothes or stuff for herself are important, but the things she does every day for her children. And when she sees all of them sitting together to have a dinner, that's what makes her happy. And I feel the same. I think, that's what Matka Polka's like; she doesn't care that much about herself but she gives to her children, to her family, she doesn't care to have a new piece of clothing or a new pair of shoes. I try to be like that but we'll see where my efforts go. We'll see how my children will cope in life.

Kasia is expressing an admiration for other women, who she perceived 'achieved' Matka Polka: the reproductive role, the religious aspects of selfless motherhood—modest, without needs of her own, devoting an unconditional self to her children, proud, happy—Kasia drew attention to the interests infused in the myth, which reveal complexities not only of the messages embedded within the myth but also in the way she perceived women drew on these different aspects. Later on in her narrative, Kasia spoke about work life outside the home realm saying that

...this stage of nappies, babies' clothes and so on must finish at some point. For some women it comes to an end straight after maternity leave. These women go back to work, but I didn't because I never had a job before, the situation didn't force me...

Also, later on in her interview Kasia stressed the importance of doing something other than 'staying preoccupied with children':

A woman needs to fulfil herself. She cannot close herself in the house and stay preoccupied with children ... at some point they [children] will leave the house and you stay alone without anyone, without any interests, any professional goals, so it will be very difficult. Therefore one must do something in addition to caring for the children. Once the stage of the nappies and breastfeeding passes you must do something.

These last extracts show three plots: a mother who wanted to 'be there' for her children, a woman who, in her own words, 'closed herself in the house [long beyond] the nappies'

stage', and someone who recognises she could be perceived as lacking self-fulfilment. These illuminate conflicting aspects of an individual narrative, and help to show the practices of reflexivity and agency intertwined in Kasia's narrative. What becomes clear then from this analysis is that in order to position oneself as being a 'good mother' one still must engage with the powerful myth of Matka Polka. Complete devotion solely to reproduction goes against the conventional principles of the coping mother. Exclusive dedication to being a full-time mother is not something historically written into scripts of the 'good mother' discourse in Poland or into modern versions of being a self-motivated, fulfilled, ambitious individual. For one's life to echo this script one must face the reality of being able to be a reproducer *and* also a producer—and production at home does not fit this equation. Kasia feels that her own life course echoes with only some aspects of the Matka Polka myth as the shifts in her discourse demonstrate.

So taking Kasia's entire narrative, the analysis of the various layers exposes her internal struggle to produce a single coherent account. Kasia struggles to accommodate her desire to embrace the two dominant discourses she feels are important: the one focused on the new market and new opportunities in post-communist Poland and the one which encapsulates the concept of the coping mother as seen by Kasia in its invocation of Matka Polka. Although Kasia enjoys a life which is clearly privileged in socio-economic terms, Kasia has yet to draw on the opportunities offered by the free market as an independent, autonomous woman working outside the home. In contrast, the central theme in the stories of the other younger professional participants powerfully and coherently drew more dominantly on a neoliberal discourse. Kasia speaks with admiration of the opportunities now available for professional development in the post-1989 Poland, the opportunities she cautiously feels she may yet be able to benefit from (as she considers starting her own business) in the future. The additional powerful factor that shapes the trajectory of Kasia's life is the myth of Matka Polka and here again she struggles with claiming the full authority over her mothering role which she feels she is not fulfilling properly. There is no place within the powerful ideology surrounding the idea of 'good mothering' in Poland for a woman to 'just' be a mother. The irony of Kasia's situation seems to be that by becoming a full-time mother she considers she has doubly failed: first, as a non-working woman she does not fit the 'winners' category and secondly, as a non-working mother she has not fulfilled her idealised role model of Matka Polka. Encouragingly, however, the interview offered Kasia a way to reflect on her life in ways she might not have otherwise done. In discussing the idea of how self and individuality are important for each woman, Kasia claimed authority over these notions too: in highlighting that she planned to do more things for herself, such as running her own business, and in

asserting that a woman should not be defined exclusively within the framework provided by motherhood. Kasia's example confirms that a working mother is still a valid ideal for many women in Poland.

Magda

Magda, aged 30 at the time of my interview, listed three significant events in her life since leaving school: getting married, moving to Warszawa, and having a baby. The baby boy was just one year old when we met. Magda moved because previously she and her husband had jobs in two different cities and therefore for the most part lived separately. When Magda was offered a good job in the same city as her husband it was an opportunity to start living together as a family unit. As university graduates, both Magda and her husband now have well-paid jobs in Warszawa: Magda in a managerial position in a bank and her husband as a high-level sales representative in a telecommunication company, both typical examples of realising the neoliberal ideals of development and productivity in the post transformation market. Magda returned to work after six months of maternity leave 'to go out of the circle' (that she portrayed as the full-time caring of her baby and running of the house) and although she stated that she would like to stay with her little son a bit longer, she vigorously refused the idea of a stay-at-home mother; in Magda's words: 'the child is not the ultimate centre and sense in her life'. She spoke about her job being important in terms of the money and promotion opportunities. Her comfortable economic situation meant that her little boy could be looked after by a nanny. This is still considered a luxury in Poland. Finally, although she was brought up by a very religious mother, Magda describes her relationship with the Catholic Church as 'loose' and openly demarcates the boundaries between modern social tradition and a perceived archaic religious tradition, a common trend amongst the younger participants.

I don't go to church, to be honest with you ... we have baptised our son, but it was more a cultural event rather than religious. We got married in church for the same reasons. It was more to preserve some kind of tradition.

When assessing the transformation generally and then specifically regarding the experiences of mothers, Magda perceived all the changes to have been immensely positive. The career opportunities that the younger generations are offered together with the greater availability of the goods and services needed to bring up a child were all seen as good outcomes. From Magda's point of view the social and moral shift in society has been wholly responsible for

enabling her to advance her own social position, education and vocational status. With regard to her current family status, Magda directly ascribes the positive development of her husband's more equal role in family life as being entirely due to the effects of the transformation.

In general terms Magda's narrative corresponds with the image of the 'New Polish Woman' and her account is controlled and carefully managed. She describes her own motherhood as something mature and expected: something that she anticipated and carefully planned. Her relationship with her husband is depicted as egalitarian and he is introduced as an involved father. When discussing motherhood during the communist era Magda strongly distances herself from the experiences of her own mother, which she considers to have been a desolate existence running house and home, caring for children, and in which her father was a blurred figure in the home sphere. Magda describes what she saw as a malaise as a result of her mother's 'dependency on children'. On several occasions during the interview Magda stated that she considers herself a 'modern mum', an image that according to her embodies planned motherhood and the ability to combine career and children. This is different to how Magda perceived her own mother. Despite the fact that her mother also worked and mothered, the paid work during the communist era did not represent the same value as it does for Magda today. The job was 'given' or 'assigned' by the system, whereas today Magda had to work hard to be in the position to claim a successful 'professional career'. This illustrates the specific perspective that Magda can afford from her privileged socio-economic position. Magda also spoke of her impressions of 'Matka Polka'. For Magda, Matka Polka is a stay-at-home mother, a housewife, non working, and contented woman, which is different to how the majority of women in the study conceptualise the myth as embodying notions of enmeshing reproduction with production.

At a more intricate level, however, the analysis of Magda's account reveals obvious contradictions and tensions exposing the multiplicity of threads that are intermingled in her narrative. Crucially, the analysis of Magda's case must be seen through her confident disregard of Matka Polka as having any relevance to her life, because only with that in mind the conflicts and contradictions in her narrative become more apparent. Magda brought up the concept of Matka Polka when comparing her 'busy' and 'successful' life of a working mother with her stay-at-home friends. It is those mothers who devoted themselves to their families that represented for Magda Matka Polkas. When narrating her experience of being a mother Magda initially presented her role very positively stating that she became warmer and more domestic and that she feels very good as a mum and is happy when the family is together. Being a modern mum was something that Magda was truly proud of: she felt that

she had everything under control, that she was organised, and that she had a husband who helps and supports her a lot, something that in her view really set her experiences far apart from the model of a traditional mother in Poland. The idea of balancing work and having a child, being able to travel for business and leave her child behind, and most importantly not losing a focus on life's priorities – all of these Magda considers demonstrate her modern approach towards motherhood. But, once Magda started reflecting on her early experiences of becoming a mother, it became clear that the story was not so straightforward:

I had a problem with feeding him. Something that I wasn't even thinking of, I wasn't prepared. I thought everything would be just perfect. I had a great time during my pregnancy and I pictured myself as this easy, great mother. But, he didn't want to be breastfed and I really wanted to do that, I cared deeply about that. So, I decided that I will collect my milk and then feed him with it through the bottle. It sounds so simple, doesn't it? But in reality it's so much work, so much work ... I didn't want him to have a colic, so at the beginning I was eating only bread with lettuce ... So the whole pseudo breastfeeding was really complicated; he would wake up at 3am, I had the milk ready from the night before, I fed him and then held him in my arms until he burped, because I read that sometimes if you don't pay attention to that it can cause colic too. I wanted to spare him that, you know, you do everything for your child. So, once he was fed he would usually fall asleep and I would take my apparatus out and start collecting my milk, so when he woke up in 3 hours he would have the milk ready to eat. It was all happening in the middle of the night. When I finished with the milk I had to clean the whole apparatus because, you know, I didn't want any bacteria to develop there. It would take me about 2 hours, I would go back to sleep, and after an hour he was hungry again, and I had to get up again and feed him. And it would start all over again. But it wasn't even the fact that I didn't get enough sleep, no, it was more that I felt so unorganised ... I couldn't go out anywhere with him, because I had to collect the milk. So, once I collected the milk he would fall asleep, I didn't want to wake him up, when he woke up I had to feed him, and start everything all over again, it was something really, really terrible...

Clearly, it was very important for Magda to be able to fulfil her assumed biological responsibility to nurture her newborn baby. This problem reflects discussions in the broader literature where women's subjective expectations are embedded and reinforced by notions of 'nature' and 'instinct' (Miller, 2007; Bobel, 2002; Hays, 1996; Oakley, 1979; Rich, 1977). The distance between Magda's desires and reality—for things to be perfect in anticipation of being a great mother but challenged by the reality of her distressing breastfeeding regime caused her deep disappointment and frustration. The clash of expectations between the emotions before having a child and the subsequent reality of mothering has been the subject of thorough analysis by authors such as Tina Miller (2005; 2007) and Bogusława Budrowska (2000). What this clash represents in Magda's account is the narrative conflict between how she initially related her story of her earlier self against how she later conceded she actually felt during this early stage of being a mother. These conflicts relate to different layers of presenting self: as an organised and coping mother who nevertheless felt disorganised and

'terrible'; as someone whose priorities have not changed because of the child but who still is clearly demonstrating how she is doing absolutely everything for her child. Magda's professional persona of being detailed and precise comes through in the way she meticulously describes the process of feeding her newborn baby. But this elaborate and painstaking feeding method also exposes how engaged she was in the actual experience and contradicts her view that the child is not the main priority in her life. This contradiction is further reinforced as Magda also weaves a thread throughout her narrative referring to the emotions of suppression, restriction and pain that she associates with being a mother:

... a very high cost, really ... I never ever suspected such horribly restricted freedom, you don't have any freedom, any, you can't do anything, really nothing...it's something monstrous, like ... this complete devotion to your baby, giving yourself so completely to him...

And again later on in her narrative:

...after work I HAVE to go home straight away because there is a child waiting for me ... even though I have a nanny who is really good and very flexible, but ... you just don't have a space for ... not even ... I don't want to use word fantasy but ... any freedom ... you feel like strolling through the shops, it doesn't exist for you any more, forget it. Do you need to buy shoes? You have to buy them in the first two shops you visit, because you won't have the time for the third shop. So, really, very, very restricted freedom.

And once again, Magda comes back to this thread:

... there is that extremely powerful feeling of suppression. I never realised that a child can dominate you so much. ... you read about the lack of sleep and the lack of time for reading books, but what you actually experience, it's just, I didn't even dream about that, you are utterly, completely for this child, in a constant demand from that child, all day long ...

Magda repeatedly underlines the overpowering emotions that she said she did not envisage. On the other hand, she also speaks about how much easier it is for her to make sacrifices than it is for her husband:

With getting up during the night ... I mean my husband ... when he does it once in a blue moon, he's then half conscious during the day ... But I'm fine waking up in the middle of the night, I got used to it. I'm not sure whether this is a woman/man thing ... probably that, but I can just do it more easily, I guess I find it easier to sacrifice myself for the baby than my husband because I am a woman.

Here Magda is not only sidelining her husband as the one who she thinks is weaker, but is also reinforcing the assumption that women are naturally better suited to mothering and the making of sacrifices in its name. The edifice of the sacrifice, the getting up in the middle of

the night which she thinks is less stressful for her than for her husband, also highlights how Magda voices disapproval for the way her life has been suppressed by the child - such sentiments ironically only serve to perpetuate the unbalanced arrangement. Interestingly, this also stands in stark contrast to how Magda positions her husband as an involved and competent father elsewhere in her narrative:

He knows how to feed him, what to feed him, how to bathe and dress him, he knows the baby's different ways of crying, when hungry or tired or just moody. So, yes, he does all of that.

In presenting her husband as coping and competent father Magda is also able to present herself as a modern mum. Yet, initially what appeared as a confident account of a modern mum becomes increasingly more fragmented and more candid:

How do I feel with that? I feel rebellious, because I would like my husband to help me more. He does sometimes, but usually it doesn't work as I would like. So, no, I don't feel good about that, it causes arguments in the house...

During the interview Magda reflexively establishes that in practice her husband has more space to exercise his individuality and express his freedom. This in turn triggers frustration and leads Magda to reveal the inequalities in her home:

... I would like him to spend more time with our son, I would like him to be home earlier, because he doesn't have that contact with our son as I do. The fact that...he prefers to watch football on TV rather than bathe the baby; I don't like it that much. Also, he is the one who can make plans, for instance, he wants to go now with his friends from work to see a game, so he goes. When I want to do something I consult that with him, check if it's okay, and arrange things with the nanny, and he ... I'll tell you ... he doesn't feel that restriction from the fact that there is a child, he just completely doesn't feel dominated by this child, whereas I do feel dominated by the child. But I don't think he could understand me until he is as suppressed, so overwhelmed as I am.

In the course of her interview then, having the time to think and reflect on her arrangements at home, Magda's narrative shifts from the contented modern mum to a mother who feels restricted and dominated by her child. Her competent and coping husband becomes less helpful and the egalitarian relationship appears to be just a vision that Magda had fostered but which did not reflect the day-to-day arrangements of their lives. Furthermore, even though Magda, like other women from her generation, demonstrated a clear social shift in her versions of femininities (as compared to those embraced by the older cohort), she still can be seen as succumbed to the powerful ideology and convention in which women are best suited to the child-caring responsibilities. This echoes the dilemmas affecting women in

many other countries and contributes to the debates in the wider literature that discuss the cultural scripts that shape women's understandings and experiences of motherhood (Gatrell, 2005; 2008; Miller, 2007; Budrowska, 2000).

Finally, Magda's attempt to present herself both as a professional and a socially modern mother, serves to illustrate the unfashionable oppressive aspect of the powerful concept of the coping mother. It is almost impossible for women to escape such dominant representations when they lay so deep in the cultural understanding of what it means to be a woman and mother. Furthermore, Magda's case demonstrates the subtleties involved in analysing a narrative construction of self by exposing, for example, how even through a rejection of the idea of Matka Polka one must still acknowledge such influential gendered mythology.

Magda, like the majority of the younger cohort, presented herself as a reproducer, producer, wife and mother, as functionally different in comparison to the older cohort. However, analysis of her narrative clearly shows that many aspects of women's lives remain unchanged. Magda may feel as if she has freed herself from the conventional Matka Polka mantle and discursively positioned herself as a modern mum. However, cultural scripts associated with motherhood continue to define in powerful ways which gender takes care of children and how the responsibilities for child caring and rearing are shared. These cultural scripts and ideologies still rigidly shape the actual lives of many women (see e.g. Miller, 2005; 2007; Mullin, 2005; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1989). Magda's biological ties to her child and society's assumptions circumscribe her experiences as a mother in similar ways to the experiences of her own mother. It is not Siebert's 'New Polish Woman' that fully defines Magda; it is a complex concoction of the essentialist 'natural borne' ideology, religion, iconography, economics and politics.

Conclusions

These two case studies of the younger cohort were chosen to demonstrate how women narrate their experiences of motherhood in the neoliberal context of the capitalist Poland in order to illuminate change and continuity in women's lives as mothers. Their urban locale and socio-economic status privileged them when compared with other mothers who have experienced the transformation in Poland. The specific context of their lives had a bearing on their views and opinions about the consequences of the transformation and informed their attitudes towards mothering. The chapter contributes to the general understanding of the

changes and continuities in women's lives as mothers when compared with the older cohort. Kasia's struggle with her role as a stay-at-home mother echoed the dilemmas voiced by Alexandra, the communist era mother. Both Kasia and Aleksandra felt the narrative of their lives did not fit the prevailing model of the working mother. Magda's story is equally complex. She presents herself as a 'modern mum' describing a carefully planned motherhood, of having egalitarian relations with her husband, of her higher education and well-paid job in the city and her apparent desire to match the glamorised model of the 'New Polish Woman'. But the contradictions and conflicts that appear later in her narrative reveal the pressures dictated by the culturally conditioned discourses of what it means to be a mother in Poland. Magda was unable to escape the power of the concept of 'selfless motherhood', a selfless motherhood defined by the ideas of coping, dedication and exclusive female competency. In terms of gender equality, Magda's experiences in the home sphere are narrated as just and based on partnership including the modern expectations placed on men in their roles as fathers. Certainly this stands in stark contrast when compared with Aniela's case study from the communist era. Aniela's account does not reveal her ever having such expectations even if she indicated her dissatisfaction with the gendered *status quo*. That illustrates the extent to which context generates meaning. Both women probably desired egalitarian family arrangements, but while the communist framework denied such ambitions, the neoliberal metanarrative allows for redefinitions of expectations linked with gender roles and relations. For example, Magda's husband was consciously presented by her as an involved and competent father and represents a contrasting model to Aniela's husband, a role so devoid of positive presence that he hardly found his way into Aniela's accounts of family life (except for the episode with peeling potatoes, which established her as the informal manager of the household). The closer analysis offered by the case study approach revealed that Magda, like Aniela, often felt she was the only one truly responsible for childcare. This unintended reinforcing of the patriarchal gendered stereotype works at odds with the foundational script of the new market metanarrative promoted in Poland under transformation.

The analysis in this chapter contributes to the theoretical understandings of women's lives revealing how the culturally and socially constructed representations of the seemingly appropriate womanhood continue to influence women's expectations and experiences as mothers. The analysis in this chapter reveals the dominance of the market metanarrative and neoliberalism in the ways these two participants felt compelled to engage with the notions of individualism and individual choice. For Magda, it meant presenting herself as a 'modern mum' with a professional career and a busy life not necessarily centred on the child. For

Kasia, the importance of the individual meant that she made sure I would not leave her house without being reassured that despite having devoted her life to the children she indeed recognised the meaning and value of self-realisation and anticipated a professional project of her own.

The concept of individualism, a powerful symbol of Western-style liberal democracy, clearly shaped these women's constructions of the producer/reproducer identities. Equally though, the analyses in this chapter expose the continuous importance of the concept of the coping mother as a symbolic resource that has been yet again pressed into service by a variety of pressures that have emerged in the post-communist Poland: the Catholic Church, the hegemonic representations of the neoliberalism-tinged 'New Polish Woman', and the masculinist state, all drawing upon the revitalisation of cultural traditions relating to family life. An interesting outcome of this study is the way Kasia, as the non-working mother, could be seen as being doubly-burdened by a new, specifically Polish form of this concept. Faced with the Western values (with individuality at their core) and with the image of the strong and selfless working mother, Kasia was unable to fully subscribe to any of these dominant scripts. The new double-burden, which is a revamped version of the familiar concept of the coping mother but glittered with individualism, sexual attraction, and a promise of success, was perceived by her as a desired but hardly attainable ideal. In a way, she saw through the superficiality of the neoliberal ideology and its incompatibility with the challenges of what constituted for her the real life where she felt compelled to assume and fulfil the perceived needs of responsible mothering associated with full devotion to the home realm. Thus Kasia epitomised the struggles of contemporary Polish women whose lives and life choices are being sanctioned by the market metanarrative and the concept of the coping mother.

The analysis offered in the last two chapters is based on a case study approach. This method has its limitations if large numbers of interviews are required. However, such large data samples in the context of this thesis are not more informative if correctly qualified. The research sample for this thesis has been selected using a defined range of parameters with the specific purpose of collecting data from a data set that could be readily identified as the beneficiaries of the post-communist transformation. The level of detail that has therefore been made available by examination has exposed intricate internal conflicts and contradictions of women with a certain level of education, living in urban agglomerations and being in a relatively secured employment. This is a multilevel and multifaceted analysis and has proved to be an ideal format for addressing the proposition of this thesis.

Chapter 8

Discussion and Conclusions – Continuities and Changes in Mothers' Lives in Poland

This thesis has shown how the historical, social and cultural contexts of the post-communist transformations have shaped mothering experiences and constructions of motherhood in Poland. The intersections of dramatic historical and economic shifts, legislative and social changes, as well as rearticulated rhetorical constructions and cultural expectations were reflected in the multifaceted narratives collected and analysed in the thesis. Through the research approach adopted I have demonstrated how a relatively privileged group of mothers have been affected by the larger social, political and economic forces that comprise the neoliberal context in post-1989 Poland. The research approach focused upon individual narratives which were then analysed and presented as selected case studies.

The findings reveal the tensions, unequal opportunities and lived experiences of the two cohorts of mothers within the context of neoliberal Poland. The focus on experiences of the younger cohort confirmed the emergence of new pressures, challenges and new contemporary representations of womanhood, as in the glamorised coping mother captured by Seibert (2001) in her image of the 'New Polish Woman'. But there was evidence too of persistent older rhetorical constructions, such as the exhausted coping heroine as epitomised by Matka Polka. The analysis of the narratives from the younger mothers, who could potentially be seen as being in a position to claim this new identity, demonstrated, however, that the novel character of this representation only *appears* to be original. In reality, the image of the 'New Polish Woman' is a revamped—through the possibilities provided by neoliberal discourses—version of older representations of the working and coping Polish mother. In this contemporary construction of successful Polish motherhood there are additional demands. Ultimately, considering both the contrived novelty of the 'New Polish Woman' and the historical ambiguity of Matka Polka, I argue that while these constructions *provided reference points* for both cohorts, neither provided adequate cultural models to capture the experiences of the new generation of mothers in Poland.

It is critical to acknowledge the ways in which elements of the social, political and economic transformation have affected experiences of motherhood in Poland, guided by aspects of neoliberalist discourses as well as cultural expectations defined by various myths, metaphors

and cultural incarnations of the idea of the coping mother. Thus, in this thesis the conceptual framework of transformations and new metanarratives of neoliberalism have provided an important theoretical and political context. I have presented the transformation as a process of sweeping and fast-paced economic, political, social and cultural changes which have significantly influenced mothers' lives in Poland, largely in negative ways.

The discussions in this thesis contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the post-communist environment and the location of the 'mother' in the state's rhetoric: from the emancipated working mother of the communist era to the one of the post-communist time - in theory more autonomous but in practice more constrained as a consequence of the reduction or removal of state support. The approach taken in this thesis provides a unique contribution to the study of Polish motherhood set against the complex milieu of post-communist transformations illuminated through the tensions, ambiguities and pressures experienced on a daily basis by Polish mothers as related through their life stories. While various scripts emerged through the analysis of the personal accounts, the continuities that transpired through the narratives of both generations affirmed the dominance of certain existing cultural models and expectations such as the ever prevailing idea of the Polish coping mother transformed into the image of the 'New Polish Woman' but also vernacularly preserved in the contested myth of Matka Polka. This dominance, illuminates not only the specific limitations but the general inadequacy of these gendered archetypes which are nonetheless powerful.

The Shifting Context of Polish Mothering: Power and Agency

A significant influence in women's experiences as mothers was found to be the ways in which the transformations had occurred in Poland. The state-encouraged 'shock therapy' and the state-supported liberalisation of the economy left the majority of society devoid of state protection and so vulnerable to the capitalist market forces. This led to dramatic changes in the social structure which has led in academia (as well as more popularly) to theorisations in terms of transformational 'winners' and 'losers'. The form of capitalism introduced in Poland resulted in a new social order characterised by profound class inequalities, a new dependency of the poor and a location-determined ability to exercise individual rights to healthcare, education and active citizenship (Watson, 2006).

Under the slogan of 'a little more democracy, a little more freedom, a little more openness' (Dowd, 1989) capitalist democracy was introduced in Poland under the 'expert' eye of

Western advisors. Western consultants advised on privatisation and healthcare reform, promoted meritocracy and active citizenship, controlled foreign aid distribution and facilitated opening Polish markets to foreign investors. The new lexicon appropriated by the state promoted neoliberal democratic principles valuing risk taking, innovation, free enterprise and small business and viewed with increasing suspicion any vestiges of the welfare state, such as free healthcare, education, job security and state benefits. But in spite of this benevolent rhetoric, the price of such assistance in terms of social effects has been high. The road to democratic equality in the Polish context has resulted in the loss of rights previously protected by the communist state under a comparable rhetoric of equality: access to specialised free healthcare has become more limited and only exists in certain regions, free education severely restricted, and free childcare non-existent. Ironically, the equalisation of the Polish society has generated social inequality and deep polarisation within the society (Watson, 2006).

In addition to the power of the political forces which oversaw and authenticated the post-communist transformation, a new significant player has also been instrumental in setting the tone of the political, economic, social and cultural reforms. Since 1989, the Catholic Church has dominated many national debates, particularly those regarding family life and the moral issues in society. Significantly, laws regulating the role of religion in Poland, the reproductive rights of women and the presence of religious symbols and figures in public life have been introduced despite active protests from large sections of society. The battle over the right to abortion in 1993 was especially symbolic of the patriarchal disregard for women's rights and the altered position of motherhood in Poland.

Male-dominated institutions and power centres, such as the state, the Church and the patriarchal family, continue to profoundly affect mothering experiences in Poland. The changing governments and the political parties in power continue to refuse to provide assistance to mothers who want or need to return to the workplace and endorse Church-initiated restrictions on women's agency, such as the ban on abortion. One of the more recent public debates involves a right not to sell contraceptives sought by a group of Polish pharmacists who find the practice at odds with their religious beliefs.⁹⁹ Their right to see contraception as a threat to the so-called potential for human life and therefore to refuse to provide the service which is part of pharmacists' professional contract with the National Health Fund (NFZ) counteracts the women's right to control their reproduction.¹⁰⁰ Such examples represent a retrograde step in terms of women's rights but also denote the powerful players operating in the public sphere and illustrate how elements of power can operate in the neoliberal context of contemporary Poland. The patriarchal attitudes are also

reflected in the microcosm of the Polish family where research shows that most men still do not participate equally in the chores of everyday life and fail to relieve their partners of the double-burden (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000; Oleksy, 2000; Graff, 2003; Walczewska, 2000). The paradigm of the 'coping mother' is for the most part not a choice but a necessity for majority of Polish women who struggle to overcome the constraints of cultural expectations.

As the larger discussion of the social, cultural and ideological contexts has shown, the changing role of the state, in particular its diminished role in regulating social and economic processes, has had a profound impact on women's lives, and specifically within the context of this thesis, their experiences of mothering. The increased role of the government in terms of pursuing neoliberal policies combined with its diminished role in terms of providing welfare for its citizens has resulted in a paradoxical situation where a focus on individual autonomy has disproportionately affected the lives of women in the form of increased dependency and anxiety. For example, deprived of state-run kindergartens, adequate healthcare and post-maternity job security Polish mothers fall short of becoming equal participants in the competitive capitalist market of jobs and ideas. In the post-communist context of Polish capitalism and democracy the ideal of the autonomous individual in fact does not offer equal or better opportunities to everyone but adversely affects mothers in particular.

A better understanding of the links between the different forms of power (political, economic, cultural and social) and their impact on women's abilities to exercise agency, especially in their roles as mothers, is provided through the intergenerational analysis undertaken in this thesis. The life contexts of the older cohort appeared to be much more restrictive in ways the communist propaganda and politics defined and facilitated the role of the working mother. While officially the socialist concepts of an individual might have been aimed at emancipating women, the actual experiences as narrated by the older participants, illuminated how the communist reality (but also the socially and culturally conditioned expectations towards women) circumscribed the ways in which many of them felt they should present themselves as the ever coping heroic mothers. Ironically, the post-communist context did not liberate Polish mothers in the way its liberatory rhetoric promised. Women may have better access to consumer goods and baby products and their identities on the surface leave more room for negotiation but in reality their life choices are often just as constrained (in different ways) as under communism. State and Church-supported ideals of 'appropriate' or 'good' motherhood in the post-communist era promote restrictive measures that discriminate against women and leave them with difficult choices with regard to career

and family planning. Some of the more serious consequences of the new gender politics in post-communist Poland include an unprecedented decline in the birth rate and the new phenomenon of drastically delayed (or even forgone) motherhood.

My research has shown that in Poland gender roles in reality have not undergone significant changes during the time of the post-communist transformation. As Chapter 2 traces, the communist era bore witness to redefinitions of the private and public spheres, which shaped constructions of gendered roles (as experienced within the home realm) by fostering traditionally understood identities of men and women. The public sphere was pervaded by the communist state and hardly any political activity outside of the Party membership was feasible.¹⁰¹ The constrained public life contributed to men's sense of emasculation and many women consciously assumed submissive roles in order to help their husbands overcome such feelings (Havelková 1993).¹⁰² Indeed, this was the case amongst some of the women in the older cohort in this study (see Chapter 6). While their narratives often exposed inequalities within the home, the women presented themselves as those who unofficially held the power in their domestic and familial arrangements. Their opportunities for individuality outside of the domestic life may have seemed unobtainable but, while positioning themselves in seemingly passive and submissive roles within the home realm, in fact these women were using agency in powerful ways and in many narratives a sense of autonomy transpired when the older mothers presented themselves as indestructible, brave and always coping mothers and wives. Contrary to the experiences of the older cohort, the younger women mothered in the post-communist Poland where notions of individual choice and new freedoms represent benchmarks of neoliberal democracy as shared with other Western societies (Bauman, 2000; 2002; 2003; Giddens, 1991; 1992; 1994). In their narrations, the younger mothers presented themselves as 'more mature' (when compared to the older cohort) and as faced with more responsibilities and opportunities to exercise decision making. Echoing the elements of the neoliberal discourse, their accounts of mothering were informed by aspects of choice, planning and control, where they assigned significant value to their greater freedom and wider choices, and distanced themselves from the versions of womanhood depicted by the women of their own mothers' generation. Through their accounts, the younger cohort attempted to portray themselves as having more egalitarian and collaborative gender relations at home. Using references to behaviours that implied perceived individuality and autonomy their accounts appeared to demonstrate the apparent shifts in their experiences within the private home realm. In many cases, however, the actual practices of gender as related by the participants or observed during the interviews contradicted these women's narrations of individuality and equality.

It becomes clear then that changes in the labour market driven by the neoliberal principles have dramatically redefined the role, meaning, and position of motherhood and mothering in Poland at the levels of national rhetoric, public discourse and individual lives. What was presumed as a woman's 'natural' role and supported by the state's propaganda and associated politics during the communist era is now seen as an impediment to participation in the privatised labour market. The concept of the neoliberal worker does not easily facilitate the requirements of the maternal role. As illustrated in Chapter 3, women who become mothers often experience discrimination. This discrimination of course differs depending on the woman's socio-economic position. For the participants of this study, the inequalities and difficulties were clearly different than for the mothers for whom the transformation has offered less favourable outcomes. Almost all of the younger women in this study opted for the model of the working mother (except for Kasia). Yet, their ability to fully engage in the labour market was greatly disciplined by the demands of their maternal work. Their individuality, freedom and opportunities as working mothers were considerably restricted and so choices often had to be made between a professional career and motherhood. Their decision to combine both meant that they had to make concessions with regard to the apparent privileges linked with their socio-economic positions.

For the majority of the participants in this study lives and identities as women, mothers and workers were outcomes influenced by the particular socio-political contexts, which differed significantly between the communist and post-communist periods. While the older cohort might have had less freedom, they had a certain degree of choice about motherhood and paid work as the state supported and facilitated their dual roles. For the younger cohort, the options might well appear much greater than for the older women but in everyday practice their lives and identities have been constrained by ('new') normative constructions and contexts, in which elements are not so unlike those available to the older cohort.

The Post-Communist Transformation and Motherhood: Continuities and Changes

Changes at the legislative level in the post-communist period have contributed to declining fertility rates, growing poverty amongst some groups (single parents, large families and those residing in the rural areas) and deteriorating standards of living for many families (see Chapter 3). Importantly, the economic and political shifts from communism to capitalism have borne witness to profound changes in the character of power relations in Poland. As outlined in Chapter 1, these effects of the changes can be seen in the social structures, social

life, social arrangements, and the ways constructions of selfhood are now associated more with individualism than, as in the previous era, with the prerogatives of the communist state (Watson, 2000:376). In the data, this was clearly demonstrated when comparing the experiences of the two generations. Notwithstanding the more palpable determinants, such as legislative measures and social benefits (or lack thereof according to the respective state ideologies), in their narratives the mothers of both eras could be seen as attempting to construct their selves with reference to the prevailing representations of womanhood dominant of their times.

It is clear that the post-communist period has introduced new discourses that articulate and construct individuals in ways that stand in contrast with how personhood was understood in the previous communist era. Individual self-interest, autonomy, self-regulation, flexibility and responsiveness now form the novel ideology of the liberated worker (Dunn, 2004; Weiner, 2007). These profound shifts were evident in the narratives of both cohorts in this study. For the majority of the older women the concept of the working mother was 'natural' and 'obvious' and both roles were conflated; being a working mother was something a majority of them were proud of and this legacy was seen as a positive outcome of the communist times. These older women rarely questioned their double-burden, but equally, their paid work was not central to their sense of their self. Rather, the fact that they were contributing to the family budgets and were able to present themselves as coping in the difficult communist times significantly shaped their narratives.

Yet the importance of self-realisation, self-satisfaction, freedom and choices in the ways they lived their lives was a feature of the narratives of the younger cohort. For the majority of them, the ability to take advantage of their human capital (in a form of high levels of education) and keep and develop (to a certain degree) their working lives outside of the home realm formed an important part of their narratives. The ideas of individuality and control were prevalent in these women's narratives again drawing on elements of neoliberal discourse. As highlighted by Stephanie Lawler, in late modern societies 'personhood is secured through the exercise of choice' and the younger cohort enthusiastically positioned themselves as having choices when narrating their experiences as mothers and how these related to their notions of personhood (2000:159). All these changes indicate intergenerational shifts in constructions of femininities and selves illuminating differences in the ways the women from both cohorts positioned themselves in their narratives. Importantly, the intricacies of individual lives became more apparent when the closer analysis through a case study approach exposed contradictions and conflicts: the in-depth

analysis reveals dominant and obdurate elements of social, cultural and historical contexts that continue to shape mothers' lives in Poland.

The participants' privileged social and economic position stands in stark contrast to the struggles to secure a warm meal and heated accommodation which continue to be the reality for many mothers living in contemporary Poland.¹⁰³ The polarised post-communist society relegates most mothers to leading lives characterised by a lack of privilege or even basic social support and restricted by the hegemonic ideologies of the Church, the state and the Catholic nation. Yet, in spite of occupying the privileged position, it becomes clear through the narratives of the younger cohort that these mothers too struggle to achieve 'it all' and live up to the expectations of womanhood and motherhood as promoted in contemporary media, which offers a lens through which the problems and insecurities of less privileged mothers can be better appreciated. Torn between the requisites and possibilities of capitalism and culturally sanctioned norms of Polish womanhood, the younger mothers participating in this study often found themselves striving to meet the demands of the coping working mother. Whilst seemingly having freedom of choice and opportunities greater than other mothers, the options for these women have not been necessarily or straightforwardly greater and choices easier. This illustrated the paradox of the neoliberal autonomy whereby the lack of state support for motherhood results in the mothers becoming unequal participants in the marketplace and its newly offered 'boundless' opportunities, notwithstanding their apparent better economic status. As this thesis has demonstrated, mothers' lives in post-communist Poland are not as autonomous as neoliberal ideals might imply.

The Shifting Notions of Motherhood: Polish Cultural Models

This research revealed the surprising extent to which mothers in post-communist Poland continue to position themselves within and in relation to the traditional discourses of what it means to be a mother in Poland. Particularly striking is the continued presence of the myth of Matka Polka in some form in the Polish vernacular. Whilst the shift from communism to democracy has illuminated the fundamental change in the nature of power, the resonance of the myth demonstrates its striking obduracy. In my analysis of the women's accounts, primarily through the case studies, I have demonstrated how the ethos of the coping and selfless working mother shaped women's narrations. For example, Aniela invoked the myth of Matka Polka and criticised mothers who fit her understanding of this mothering model as linked with self-sacrifice; however, her narrative later revealed that she herself often

followed the values and practices she associated with the characteristics of Matka Polka. Aleksandra voiced her frustrations about her choice to become a stay-at-home mother and not conforming to the social expectations of the mother who 'does it all'. Kasia felt strongly that she should aspire to the neoliberal values of self-realisation and professional success but realised that she could not fulfil them while also being a good mother (in the way she understood 'good mothering') and ultimately openly declared herself an example of Matka Polka (understood by her as associated with devoted and intense mothering). Finally, Magda spoke of Matka Polka defining the idea as representing women who devote their lives solely to raising children and criticised such model of womanhood as too one-dimensional, instead favouring the model of the working, coping and self-sacrificial mother. Such accounts show that these women narrated and constructed their selves drawing upon the available discourses of 'appropriate' Polish womanhood relevant to their specific life contexts. This demonstrates how the personal narratives are embedded in time and place, enabled and constrained by their historical, cultural and social settings (Somers, 1994; Ezzy, 1998; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). Moreover, it shows the apparent inability of the mothers to ever fully liberate themselves from the constraints of the inherited models and larger social metanarratives.

The image of the coping heroic mother transpired in these accounts as fluid and adaptable, retaining some core durable elements and co-opting more modern aspects. Although in theory the idea of Matka Polka is linked with self-sacrificial motherhood in the context of nineteenth century Poland (Seibert, 2001), my data shows that it continues to influence the public discourse, national rhetoric and governmental propaganda since the time of partition through the communist era and is still widely employed in contemporary Polish vernacular. Its core tenets remain unassailable; however, this does not prevent the utilisation of the myth by different actors in different contexts for their own various interests.

While the model of motherhood epitomised in the myth of Matka Polka still appears in the public discourse, private conversations, academic expositions and journal articles, the model of womanhood and motherhood promoted and glamorised through the mass media in post-1989 Poland has been that of a successful, intelligent, and independent young individual, which encapsulates the embodiment of a late modern social actor (Titkow, 2007; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000; Łaciak, 1995). For women, this representation has been embedded in and promoted through the gendered images represented by the concept of the 'New Polish Woman' (Seibert, 2000). On closer scrutiny, this 'New Polish Woman' carries similar burdens associated with constructions of femininity inflicted on women in Poland in the past. Whilst this novel and attractive identity offers some women new opportunities to

realise possibilities arising from neoliberal policies and discourses, the simultaneous expectations for women to fulfil their biological roles as reproducers and do so within socially prescribed normative expectations significantly restrict these women's options.

The new democracy has provided new versions of womanhood which are different to the ordinary, overworked and tired versions associated with Matka Polka of the communist era. Yet, the 'New Polish Woman' has in fact only a new veneer to fit the more alluring and liberated model of the female version of the capitalist individual. However, the change is often superficial, more metaphor than reality, as the case studies revealed. This thesis has shown that ultimately, the existing social models of motherhood in Poland are inadequate and Polish mothers can struggle to find a relevant frame of reference for their mothering experience. The available models are largely superficial and prove to be designed solely to promote their historical agendas. As in many other societies, the models of motherhood are normative constructions which serve a broader purpose and are powerful representations of how societies think the maternal responsibilities should be practiced. In contemporary Poland, assuming just one social role – either a mother or a career woman – is often a cause of social criticism as women are construed as either indolent and limited or overambitious and greedy for power. In consequence, women are pressured to 'do it all' but not assisted in their attempts to achieve it. Lacking positive cultural models, state support and full equality in the public and private sphere Polish women fall back upon the only available and consistently recycled model of the coping (and often self-sacrificing) Polish mother.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis in this thesis has drawn upon neoliberalism as a political discourse which permeates aspects of Western societies and affects structures, policies, practices and individual lives. The ideas and values promoted by neoliberalism are linked with images of an autonomous, competitive and reliable worker and define not only the workings of the market but shape individual lives in various and profound ways. The powerful influence of this dominant discourse has been apparent in the narratives examined in this study. This dominance not only illuminated the contradictory expectations of women and 'choices' in their experiences as mothers, but also shed light on the exclusive and stratifying character of aspects of the neoliberal metanarrative. As the discussion in this thesis demonstrated, its possibilities, even if not fully available to the participants of this study, offered some of the participants an opportunity to draw upon this metanarrative in generating their self-

perceptions and self-constructions, resources which are usually not accessible to other groups of mothers, in particular those whose life trajectories are marked by various forms of economic struggle.

The economic problems that the great majority of the Polish mothers struggle with mean that in reality many of them simply can not afford to consider or assert themselves against the contemporary neoliberal models of the all encompassing womanhood, where being a mother sits alongside the expectation to take advantage of the new possibilities provided by capitalism. Crucially then, many Polish women are excluded from the publicly disseminated models of neoliberal womanhood, especially in their roles as mothers, as in the post-1989 context they are more likely to be in the position associated with the transformational 'losers'. Those women who are most able to engage with the emancipatory promise of the market and pursue more Western lifestyles are commonly associated with the so-called 'winners' of the transformation. Within this group, it is the women who are mothers whose practices and constructions around their experiences have been in significant ways influenced by the Western way of life. Since Poland entered the transformation period, the neoliberal values and standards have become a powerful force shaping these mothers' perceptions and expectations but also generating anxieties linked with the experiences of being a mother. Without state support, experiences of motherhood and practices of mothering are inscribed in the overarching, dominant and homogenising discourse of neoliberalism—the power structures that shape contemporary global politics and define individual lives in powerful ways. One additional remaining, obdurate and sedimented differentiator for the Polish mothers is the cultural pressure of the ideal of the coping and sacrificing mother that seems to remain prevalent.

But what does neoliberalism mean in all its guises: policy, discourses, forms of power, political and global reach, influences on societal structures and individual lives? According to Polish economist Paweł Bożyk (2008), the free market does no longer exist as proclaimed in classical liberal economy. The ideology of the free market is dictated now by transnational corporations and commonly labelled as neoliberalism. As one aspect of globalisation, the transformations in Poland have been part of the historical processes of liberalisation and integration of the post-communist countries into the new world order. The inadequacy of the political concepts applied in Poland has been discussed by many authors and woven through the discussions in this thesis to demonstrate the consequences of neoliberal politics for the deepening social inequalities and growing economic discrepancies which have impacted on the experiences of Polish mothers (see e.g. Kołodko, 2009; Kowalik, 2009; Bugaj, 2002; Poznański, 2000). As Bożyk (2008) has stated, neoliberalism is

an ideology for the rich and one that is against the interests of the poor. Yet my research shows that a seemingly privileged position is not necessarily a sufficient condition to fully realise the promise and potential embedded in neoliberal metanarratives. The change might have brought about new choices but it is accompanied by new constraints that can reinforce existing inequalities between groups of women in their roles as mothers.

I have argued in this thesis that the oversimplified dichotomous classifications of 'winners/losers' should be challenged as these categories do not sufficiently capture the complex and intricate contexts and differences in individual lives. This is partly due to the fact that such classifications usually are based on economic status and considered with respect to property and wealth (Watson, 2000:376). Whilst the participants in this study might have been in advantageous economic positions, their particular experiences linked with their family situations, their challenges in the labour market or individual struggles in fulfilling personal aspirations and societal expectations did not always align them with any 'winner' category. Furthermore, as demonstrated through other research and illuminated in this thesis, the post-communist shifts have not been particularly favourable to mothers at large (Desperak, 2009a; 2009b; Weiner, 2007; Kowalska, 2005; Stukuls, 1999; Kligman, 1996). Thus, in contributing to the ongoing discussion on the social costs of the transformation for mothers, I claim that in general terms the majority of Polish mothers have indeed become those who have 'lost' in the transformation. My findings lead me to argue that a more nuanced approach towards theorising the post-communist condition is required – one that embraces the fullest contexts of mothers' lives.

The constructions of (gendered) selves and practices in the democracy after communism continue to be disciplined through the masculinist nature of neoliberal ideology. Additionally, the legacy of history delimits available models of motherhood that could offer Polish women more positive frames of reference in the way they make sense of their experiences as mothers. By illuminating the complexities of the relationship between power, agency, gender and constructions of selves this thesis contributes to the theoretical understandings of the deeply textured aspects of women's individual lives. The thesis and its analysis make a significant qualitative contribution to post-communist studies on social stratification and offer a unique insight into the life trajectories of a group of mothers who could be perceived as beneficiaries of the transformation in Poland.

After-note

Whilst working on this project I once heard that to betray Matka Polka is like betraying one's own mother. At that time I thought how condescending that statement seemed. Whilst observing the experiences of mothers in different cultures I felt that the demands of maternal work shape all women's experiences in quite specific ways and that the Polish context should not be seen as superior or inferior or special in any way. Having now become a mother myself I recall this remark again and came to understand the power behind it. Whilst my experiences of being a mother and the contexts of my life have been set far apart from that of my own mother, I realised that much of my maternal work is greatly shaped by the way she understood what 'proper' mothering should include. My mother prides herself on emulating her impression of the Matka Polka image and somewhere deep inside my modern soul I want to be like her. I want to be proud to be Matka Polka albeit that I will weigh and balance the prescriptions of the image to reflect my own modern sensitivities.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 Sample Characteristics of Participants

Appendix 2 Interview Schedule

Appendix 3 Visual Data—Photographs:

- Butcher's Shop
- Queue for Toilet Paper
- Toilet Paper Ration
- Popular Baby's Product
- Food Rationing Coupon
- Propaganda Poster

Appendix 1

Sample Characteristics of Participants										
name	generation	age at the interview	occupation	education	age at the first child	number of children	age of children at the interview	time on maternity leave	place of residence	partnership status
Kasia	younger	32	stay-at-home mother	college	20	3	4y, 8y, 12y	12 years at home	middle size city	married
Maja	younger	33	office worker	university	27	1	5y	1 year	large city	married
Weronika	younger	35	beautician	college	24	2	11y, 9y	1 year	large city	living with a partner
Iza	younger	32	office worker	university	31	1	1y3m	6 months	large city	married
Magda	younger	30	managerial position in a bank	university	29	1	1y3m	6 months	large city	married
Ewelina	younger	31	managing director in a bank	university	27	2	4 y, 3m	6 months	large city	married
Aneta	younger	33	office worker	college	24	1	9y	1 year	large city	married
Helena	younger	35	teacher	university	28	2	7y, 4y	1 year	large city	married
Pola	younger	26	office worker	college	25	1	1y	1 year	middle size city	married
Lila	younger	27	office worker	college	27	2	3y, 1y	3 years	middle size city	living with a partner
Teresa	younger	35	architect	university	27	2	8y, 1y	6 months	large city	married
Elwira	older	51	civil servant	college	22	3	29y, 26y, 11y	2 years	middle size city	married
Alicja	older	49	civil servant	university	24	3	25y, 23y, 20y	2 years	middle size city	married
Krystyna	older	53	office worker	college	22	4	31y, 28y, 26y, 25y	1.5 years	middle size city	married
Jadwiga	older	56	office worker	college	23	2	33y, 30y	2 years	middle size city	married
Olga	older	47	cook	college	20	3	28y, 26y, 23y	2 years	middle size city	married
Wanda	older	49	physio-therapist	college	26	2	23y, 22y	2 years	middle size city	married
Irena	older	53	childminder	college	30	2	23y, 15y	1 year	large city	married
Aniela	older	54	laboratory analyst	university	28	2	26y, 15y	1 year	large city	married
Aleksandra	older	48	stay-at-home mother	college	26	3	23y, 22y, 16y	23 years at home	large city	married
Kazimiera	older	54	office worker	university	26	2	27y, 20y	1 year	large city	married
Amelia	older	55	academic researcher/managerial position	university	26	2	28y, 20y	3 years	large city	married
Ryta	older	55	freelance translator and editor	university	20	2	35y, 21y	6 months	large city	living with a partner
Antonia	older	55	university professor	university	25	3	30y, 25y, 23y	6 months	large city	married

Appendix 2

Areas for consideration in interview:

- I wonder if you could begin by telling about your life since leaving school.
- How old were you when you had your first child?
- Did you and your husband/ partner always wanted to have a child?
- Who took main responsibility for childcare when your child(ren) were younger?
- Did you always intend to combine mothering with work outside the home?
- Have you returned to work after having your baby?
- Did you want to or did you have to (financial reasons) return to work?
- What do you think are the positive aspects of being a mother?
Are there any drawbacks?
- What are the positive aspects of working outside the home?
Are there any drawbacks?
- I wonder if you could describe to me your typical day?
- I wonder if you could describe to me how you see the role of the typical Polish man in terms of family life. Do you think this has changed in recent years? (could ask them about their own husband/ father's role etc).
- I wonder what your thoughts are on the role of religion in Poland currently. Then ask questions about their own religion if you feel comfortable doing so and if they are happy to do so (attendance, church wedding, baptism, priesthood – married priests, nuns).
- I would now like to move on to ask you about the changes that have taken place in Poland. Please, think back to the times of the communist regime. How would you describe your life during those times?
- I would like you to think about yourself and your life now and before the collapse of communism. Are things different? And what things are different? (at home and at work)
- Do you think life is different now for younger women? In what ways? How would you think your life was different to the life of young women now?
- I wonder if you could describe to me what it means to be a (young/older) woman in today's Poland.
- Looking back over the past 20 years what would you say has been the most significant change in your life? Then follow with a question on most significant change to the country. (You could follow up with asking them why they have answered in the way they have)
- Do you go out often with your husband/ partner?

The illustration on page 107 and
appendix 3 pages 240-242
have been excluded at the request
of the University

Notes:

¹ For a detailed discussion on the dichotomous categories of 'winners/losers' of the transformation see for example Domański, *et al.* (2000); Glass and Kawachi (2001); Marody (2000b); Palska (2002); Jarosz (2005); Jurczyńska-McCluskey *et al.* (2006); Weiner (2007).

² It is important to acknowledge here that 'East' and 'West' are discursively reproduced as polar opposites reflecting Western hegemony and have been highly criticised, and are used here only as categories which perhaps will help to note the increasingly false distinction between the two. For a detailed discussion on this issue see for example Joanna de Groot, (2009). 'Whose "east"? Whose "west"?'

³ For example: Bednarska, M. (2011). Raport Matka Polka Kontra Życie. *Twój Styl* 2(247); Matka Polka Emerytka. Za Każde Dziecko Rok Wcześniej Na Emeryturę? *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2011.12.27; Bielecka-Prokop, M. (2011). *Dylematy Matki Polki*. Full text available from: http://kobieta.gazeta.pl/kobieta/1,107881,10704335,Dylematy_Matki_Polki.html; *Matka-Polka Pracująca, Czyli Jak Zwiększyć Aktywność Zawodową Kobiet?* Raport Fundacja FOR, Warszawa 10 (2010); Matka Polka - Czy Kobieta Pracująca - Kim Jest Dzisiejsza Bizneswoman? *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2007.04.11; Kowalczyk, I. (2003). Matka-Polka Kontra Supermatka? *Czas Kultury* 5 (113), pp. 11-21; Podgórska, J. (2003). Cień Matki Polki. *Polityka* 21 (2402). Full text available from: <http://polityka.onet.pl/162,1120664,1,0,artykul.html>; Jędrusiak M. and Kluzik-Rostkowska, J. (2007). Matka Polka Pracująca. *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2007.03.10; Monkiewicz-Świecicka, K. (2004). Matka Polka w Stresie. *Tygodnik Przegląd* 22. Full text available from: <http://www.przeglادتygodnik.pl/pl/artykul/matka-polka-stresie>.

⁴ For discussion on the various political and socio-economic effects of the post-communist see for example Feffer (1992); Glenny (1993); Brown (1991); Bruszt (1994); Bryant (1994); Kochanowicz (1997); Kołodko (1999); Domański (2000); Domański *et al.* (2000); Marody (2000); Giza-Poleszczuk *et al.* (2000); Palska (2002); Haney (2002); Jurczyńska-McCluskey *et al.* (2006); Majmurek and Szmulewicz (2009); Hardy (2009).

⁵ The Russian partition between 1772-1918; Prussian 1772-1918; and Austrian 1773-1918 (Davies, 1997:660).

⁶ During the final months of the war, at a conference in Yalta (February 1945) Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill agreed to the establishment of a strong, independent and democratic Poland and shifted the country's boundaries in a 'move towards the West.' In practice it meant that the country lost significant parts of its eastern territory to the then USSR, gaining in return considerably smaller parts in the West, formerly a territory of Germany (for more details see Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2006:274).

⁷ Davies distinguishes three phases of communist politics in Poland: the first (1944-1948) as a gradual construction of the communist 'People's Democracy'; the second (1948-1956) as the imposition of Stalinism; and the third (1956-1989) as a rule of a native 'national Communist' regime (2005:413-481). However from a socio-economic perspective it is difficult to divide 40 years of communist regime into distinct phases, as this concerns people's lives and identities. As human actions are directly related to the abiding social structure, it must be realised that the processes of construction, negotiation, and appropriation of identities would undergo significant obstruction and limitation under totalitarian rule.

⁸ More recently, an additional strain on both the economy and institutional structures came from the processes accompanying Poland's integration into the European Union in 2004 (Jasiecki, 2005).

⁹ See for example Bonnell (1996); Duke and Grime (1997); Crow and Rees (1999); Domański *et al.*, (2000); Glass and Kawachi (2001); Marody (2000b); Palska (2002); Jarosz (2005); Jurczyńska-McCluskey *et al.* (2006); Weiner (2007).

¹⁰ Some studies also distinguish one middle group: those who have not gained enough to be seen as the winners but also have not lost enough to be positioned in the group of the losers (Gilejko, 2005:183). According to various estimates, the beneficiaries of the transformation constitute the smallest group and do not exceed 15 percent of the population whilst the groups that moved downwardly represent at least 50 percent of the society leaving a substantial 'middle' represented by 35 percent of the Polish population (*ibid.*).

¹¹ Some studies suggest that the main beneficiaries of the transformation are enterprising or entrepreneurial individuals (Nee, 1989). Others argue that it is the former party members who had beneficial contacts that after 1989 allowed them to take advantage of this knowledge and power during privatisation (Staniszki, 1991; Stark, 1990). Other studies claim that it is the ones with human and cultural capital (education) that will most likely be in power in the post-communist period. Drawing on the Bourdieuan theory of different types of capital, in a publication based on a study of Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland, Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelényi and Eleanor Townsley claim that 'the new power elite of post-communism most closely resembles what Bourdieu has called "the dominated fraction of the dominant class" (Eyal *et al.*, 1997:61). In Western capitalism it exercises power principally on the basis of knowledge and the capacity and expertise to manipulate symbols – in short, "cultural capital"' (*ibid.*). The authors argue that those who currently hold the economic command positions were already in managerial positions during the communist era. Finally, the notion of 'capitalism from below' indicates that the participants of the 'second economy' (present for example in Poland and Hungary) during communism entered the new reality already experienced in an understanding of the principles and practical functioning of a capitalist style market (Szelényi, 1982).

¹² For more details see for example Desperak (2009a; 2009b); Weiner (2007); Kowalska (2005); Stukuls (1999); Kligman (1996).

¹³ In years 1994-1997 and 2002-2003.

¹⁴ For example: the estimated 3 percent drop in GDP turned out to be at the level of almost 20 percent lower; the estimated 5 percent decrease in manufacturing within two years dropped by 25 percent affecting hardest towns where the existence of the local communities was highly dependent on one factory. The goal of reaching the one-digit inflation by the end of 1990 was achieved only a decade later. For more details see: Kowalik (2007).

¹⁵ Ironically, the once dissident class in communist Poland turned conformist and seemingly very out of national character. The emotional collective view that change was necessary provided all the platform needed to ensure that the majority of the population acquiesced to the leadership's will. Stuart Shields describes what has ultimately followed change: 'those not originally co-opted, the troublemakers, are now in power. Resistance to neoliberalism in Poland has been centred on a set of anti-political, populist gestures associated with the emergence of a new right and the steady disappearance of the old left since 1989' (2008:21).

¹⁶ A good testimony to the hypocrisy and ineffectiveness of anti-Catholic measures of post-war communist governments and the deeply ingrained Polish Catholicism were the common cases of party members secretly christening their children and getting married in Church. However, communist persecutions were very real, one of the most notorious being Jerzy Popiełuszko's assassination by Polish secret services in 1984. For more details see for example Wysocki (20004).

¹⁷ The Church was involved in organising and offering accommodation for civic committees, had a voice in assessing the electoral candidates (for instance a medical doctor who was in favour of

abortion was openly criticised) and actively influenced the votes of its congregations by promoting specific candidates (Kosela, 2003:183-206).

¹⁸ For example in 1990, 51 percent of Poles voiced their opposition to the proposed law, while just after it was approved by the Senate 70 percent thought it should be moderated. It is worth noting, however, that these opinions have changed increasing the support for the 1993 antiabortion law. For more details see OBOP www.tnsglobal.pl: *Opinie Społeczne o Projekcie Ustawy 'O Prawnej Ochronie Dziecka Poczętego'* (1989); *Polacy o Prawnym Zakazie Przerwywania Ciąży* (1994); *Polacy o Aborcji* (1995); *Kompromis Aborcyjny w Polsce* (2007).

¹⁹ See for example Ladó (1991); Blumsztajn and Szlendak (2006); Budrowska (2004); Desperak (2009a; 2009b); Hardy (2009); Palska (2002).

²⁰ This also brings attention to the challenges Western and Eastern feminist scholars had to face, especially in the early stages of the transformation period—the 'uneasiness' in interactions with each other (Einhorn, 1991; Ferree, 1995; Drakulić, 1998). Different interpretations of 'oppression' and 'freedom' were constructed by women based on personal and deeply felt experiences within the state (Ferree, 1995:11). Furthermore, for Eastern women the slogans and rhetoric used by Western women resembled those utilised by Soviets, greatly discredited by many. As Laura Busheikin in her article about 'global sisterhood' explains; 'under totalitarianism, Eastern Europeans did not have a healthy environment in which to pose questions about gender [as it] was already being used in very specific ways by the regimes and as part of people's resistance' (1997:16). Thus, the challenge for women in the Eastern Bloc had been to deconstruct and disentangle feminism from the communist experience. Further obstacles were posed by the 'power dynamics' shaped by the obvious affluence of the West, which in turn often created the 'teacher-pupil' terms of the feminist discourse between West-East, and consequently proposed a suggestion about the 'paradox of (anti)feminism' in Eastern Europe (Watson, 1997; 2000, for more details see also Rosenberg, 1991; Busheikin, 1997).

²¹ See for example Corrin (1992); Funk, and Mueller (1993); Gal and Kligman (2000a; 2000b); Alsop and Hockey (2001); Titkow (2007).

²² Cited in Holmes (1997:13).

²³ Private farmers owned about 80 percent of all arable land in communist Poland. For a more detailed discussion about private peasantry during communism see for example Kocik (1996).

²⁴ According to the more recent accounts on the power resources, in Soviet-type society those who ruled had extensive allocative and authoritarian power: the development of the major means of production as well as resources for collective and individual consumption were all subjects of allocation. This had delineated significantly market forces. The authoritative power stretched over the control of information and its distribution, over formal organisations, but also over the means of surveillance and violence. For more details see for example Kennedy (1991).

²⁵ For example, the former nomenklatura have been able to utilise their previously privileged positions by advancing their contacts and connections amassed in the previous political era. As they were able to carry their knowledge and power over from before 1989, the former party cadres have become the main beneficiaries of privatisation – the ultimate 'winners'.

²⁶ For a thorough discussion on the constructionist approach see for example Rose (1989); Gergen (1991); Giddens (1991); Calhoun (1994); Jenkins (1996); Hall and du Gay (1996); Schrag (1997); Castells (1997); Elliott (2001).

²⁷ For more details see example Holstein and Gubrium (2000); McNay (2000); Frank (1997); The Personal Narratives Group (1989); Ezzy (1989); Somers (1994).

²⁸ This is not to exclude other discourses which also transpire and expose cross-cultural and more locally-specific scripts; they too will be considered when appropriate.

²⁹ See example Warner (2006); Miller (2005); Douglas and Michaels (2004); Utrio (1998); Hays (1996).

³⁰ These discourses on universal aspect of motherhood are discussed for example by Warner (2006); Douglas and Michaels (2005); McMahon (1995); Richardson (1993); Everingham (1994); Oakley (1980); Lazzare (1987).

³¹ But such a concept of 'mother' is not ubiquitous as it is to say the relational association of the 'child' operating in a particular culture. Only in societies where the child is considered as vulnerable and in the need of care, and Poland is such a case, does this conceptualisation make sense (Badinter, 1981). One can argue though that all societies at some level regard children as in need of care.

³² It is important to acknowledge the significance of this theoretical framework, but for the purpose of my discussion here I will only outline its main contours. In the context of private patriarchy, and within the rhetoric of husbands' support of 'their' wives, the main theoretical discussions have been focused on family, sexuality, and material relations (Ferree, 1995:15). In the context of public patriarchy, women's subordination by collective male power is highlighted, the role of the state as the 'guardian,' and gendered aspects of 'nationalism nation' (where the states' efforts at sustaining patriarchy are reinforced through the exploitation of women for the national interests) is widely criticised (Ferree, 1995; McClintock, 1993; Walby, 1997; Kaplan, 1993). A common feminist critique has been aimed at challenging state power so whilst the communist system can be theorised as patriarchal, it nonetheless assisted women who were mothers to meet the demands of maternal work. In this self-perpetuating dynamic—the system promoted the working mother, women were obliged to work, so the system offered support (e.g. subsidised childcare), and the mothers had to work in the public sphere—the image of the mother of that era was inextricably linked with the system and the vision of a woman who could do everything because the system supported her efforts. This supposedly advanced approach towards women's emancipation and gender equality was endorsed to promote the communist system as distinct and superior to capitalist principles. In reality, women who were also mothers during the communist era were subdued because ultimately it was still the image of the mother that was promoted whilst their other efforts in the public sphere were left largely 'invisible' as a consequence of this focus.

³³ The following instances are just exemplary though most striking and obvious instances: women's active and vital participation in the underground activities leading to the systemic breakthrough was marginalised and not recognised publicly (Penn 2003); when supporting the workers' strikes in the late 1980s the wives of those behind the barricades were greeted with the banners stating 'Women, don't disturb us, we are fighting for Poland' (Podgórska, 2003:4; Ksieniewicz, 2004; Środa, 1993); one of the first legislative changes after the collapse of the communist system was the introduction of a strict ban on abortion implemented without any public consultation.

³⁴ Although 'not enough to define her as a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1972:69, cited in McNay, 2000:110).

³⁵ Nancy's Chodorow (1978) critique of biological determinism, is perhaps most relevant to outline in the discussion on women's experiences of motherhood. In her classical now work on *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow links biological determinism with biological reproduction. In perceiving anatomy as the destiny of an individual, biological determinism perpetuates patriarchal hegemony and patriarchal culture. Within this theory, men are conceptualised through their performance as active heterosexual reproducers, whose masculine life is also linked with the cultural, social, and productive aspects of life. In this polar orientation, women are positioned as passive and receptive, and their goal is seen in reproduction and linked with the idiom of 'nature' (154-158).

³⁶ For detailed discussion on links between nation-state and motherhood see example Tohidi (1994:126); Mayer (2004); Moghadam (2003); Grayzel (1999); Radcliffe and Westwood (1996); McClintock (1995); Anthias and Yuval-Davies (1989); Enloe (1989; 2000); Jayawardena (1986).

³⁷ Questions of national identity have been tenaciously combined with the 'woman's question' in many different cultures where women, seen as the 'purveyors of culture, guardians of tradition and pillars of national identity' have frequently been employed to preserve the nation and /or in order to advance national interests (Tohidi, 1994:126; Mayer, 2004; Moghadam, 2003; Grayzel, 1999; Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996; McClintock, 1995; Anthias and Yuval-Davies, 1989; Enloe, 1989; 2000; Jayawardena, 1986). The discussion on constructions of femininities in Poland contributes to wider debates on the links between national and gendered identities. Many feminist scholars have demonstrated that the term 'nation' cannot be analysed in gender-neutral terms, and any discussion on this matter must focus on the inseparability of the subjects of the nation from the nation itself because 'womanhood' and 'manhood' are 'entangled in national (and nationalist) ideologies,' but in different ways, which often only highlights the importance of power (for more details see for example Mayer, 2004:153).

³⁸ On a feminist critique contesting such essentialising division see for example Pateman (1970; 1989); Elshtain (1981); Benn and Gaus (1983); Gamarnikow *et al.* (1983); Sassoon (1987); Sydnie (1987); Sharistanian (1987); Walby (1990); Fraser (1997). For a thorough account of this dichotomous categorisation seen as a fundamental basis of patriarchy see e.g. classical work of Hartman (1981); Beechey (1979); Eisenstein (1979); Mitchell (1975); Millet (1970).

³⁹ These are just few examples of how women's bodies have been used as national personifications. For more detailed discussion see for example Janion (2006a), Froner (1998), Mosse (1985), Warner (1985), Rickards (1968).

⁴⁰ A review of the work produced by the great Polish painters from that period clearly shows the mood of the age: *Polonia* is illustrated as chained to the rocks (the annexation of Poland), dressed in white or nude (an indication of innocence), brutally attacked or almost raped (a victim of the conqueror), and often accompanied by an eagle (the emblem of the country). Among the most famous Polish painters of that epoch were: Ary Scheffer, Jan Styka, Jan Matejko (Hartwich, 2003).

⁴¹ This was visibly associated with the French and German iconography. For a detailed discussion see Warner (1985) and Hartwich (2003).

⁴² Some feminist argue, however, that the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Babel were a subject of an 'instrumental reading' by the Soviet theorists and architects of the 'new socialist family' (see Einhorn, 1993 and sources cited there Rowbotham, 1993; Molyneux, 1981).

⁴³ While the majority of men were engaged in frontline activities, the economies of the fighting countries needed to continue the production of goods for both the front line and for the civil population—that reserve working force was made up of women (Bucher, 2000:137; Kurzynowski, 2000:189). The trend continued, and even grew in force in the post-war period, when countries participating in the war experienced significant loss of life coupled with the need for extensive rebuilding and poor or depleted economies. In such a context it should be no surprise that the communist governments were in desperate need of extra labour, and as a consequence actively targeted women to fulfil this role (Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk, 2000:155).

⁴⁴ Especially when compared with the Western Europe and North America during 1950s—characterised by distinctively divergent atmosphere where women's close associations with domesticity and the homemaker role were endorsed. The post-war years of state socialism were characterised by the duty to work, for both women and men, in order to rebuild the country and the economy after the war. Additionally much propaganda to 'reproduce the nation' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989), created a situation where reconciling professional work and motherhood became the

norm for the majority of women. Therefore, the image, so common in many Western post-war societies, of an elegant and happy housewife proud of her new kitchen appliances, was completely unknown in Poland. In fact, this image sits in stark contrast to the image of Matka Polka, the doubly-burdened 'superwoman'.

⁴⁵ Konstytucja Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej Uchwalona przez Sejm Ustawodawczy w Dniu 22 Lipca 1953 Roku, Dziennik Ustaw, Nr 33, Poz. 232 z dnia 23 lipca 1952 r.

⁴⁶ In 1970s the Polish government faced the most severe test, when a gradual increase in consumer comforts introduced in the early 1960s had begun to 'wear thin,' and a comprehensive yet sudden price reform was introduced in December 1970 (Kenney, 1999:408; Faffer, 1992:105). In a response, the angered public went on the streets in protest marches, with many men and women around the country going on strikes at their workplaces. But it was the women workers in one of the cotton mills in Łódź, who during their meeting with the regime's representative (in February 1971) refocused the government's attention on social issues managing to secure the price rise withdrawal. Considering the ways women and men might have experienced communism helps to comprehend women's victorious confrontation with the authorities (Kenney, 1999). For the women, who were expected to be the producers but also the reproducers of the communist era, the elementary needs of citizens (the need to be fed), were more imperative than men's military actions and demands for free organisation. Women's needs defined the character of their strikes shifting them from the political to the social context. Thus, the successful outcome of their confrontation was due to the very rhetoric of their protest.

⁴⁷ As noted before, these are just exemplary actions of women's contribution to the resistance movement. It is apparent that in a society restricted so severely by consumption shortages, deprived of basic needs, such actions had powerful meaning and were very important symbolically. They also added significantly to the overall work and eventual success of the resistant movement in Poland.

⁴⁸ Excepting Austria, a Catholic country itself, which applied a policy of tolerance towards Poles, foreign rulers took a strict approach towards fighting the Polish culture and tradition in order to assimilate the nation. This resulted in the Church becoming a place of gatherings, and Church services venues were often used for expressing a patriotic spirit.

⁴⁹ By providing a pastoral message the Church would also serve as a substitute for independent institution, as a guardian of generic culture, and would offer a sense of belonging. It would also facilitate and support anti-establishment activities, and with time build its institutional power. All the activities and the roles the Church and religion fulfilled in society created very strong emotional and conceptual links, and often 'in order to be patriotic people were pro-church' (Grzymała-Goszczyńska, 1999:95). Thus, 'the expansion of the Church's influence is largely intertwined with the development of Polish national identity [especially] from the era of the partitions...to the fall of communism in 1989' (Lobasz, 2004:13). The impact of those close relations between the Church and the nation had also consequences on the legislative level, when shortly after Poland regained its independence in 1918 a set of regulations was implemented including the concordat with the Apostolic See in 1925 that only strengthened Church's position (Pease, 1991). The Church continued playing its vital roles for the society during World War II, as the Nazis rightly perceived it as a part of the opposition (ibid).

⁵⁰ It is vital to acknowledge here that to view Pope John Paul II as the foundation of the great transformation changes, may be regarded as excessively Polonocentric (Ash, 1999:110). But, this view is referenced by other research done on the genesis of the 1989's revolutions (e.g. Lacomte, 2005; Ash, 1999), and is raised here because it brings closer the atmosphere of those times helping the reader to understand peculiarities of the 'bloodless revolution'. As Ash noted, '...the Pope's first great pilgrimage to Poland was that turning-point...for the first time, we saw that massive, sustained, yet supremely peaceful and self-disciplined manifestation of social unity, the gentle crowds against the Party-state, which was both the hallmark and the essential domestic catalyst of change in 1989... The Pope's visit was followed, just over a year later, by the birth of Solidarity, and without the Pope's visit it is doubtful if there would have been a Solidarity' (1999:110).

⁵¹ The examples of those similarities are also discussed by Kaari Utrio (1998) in her book about the history of European women. There, she argues, Mary as the nursing mother fostering her son resembles Egyptian goddess Isis with her son Horus on her lap, or similarly her experience as the tormented mother grieving her crucified son Jesus parallels also with Isis mourning her son Osiris (for more details see Utrio, 1998:38).

⁵² For a detailed critique within feminist theology on such essentialising interpretation of Mary's role see for example Warner (1976); Adamiak (1998); Hamington (1995); Johnson (2001); Beattie (2006).

⁵³ Under the 1956 abortion law, women could benefit from rather liberal abortion legislation as the decision whether to abort was left to the physician, with no restriction as to time of pregnancy. Poor living conditions, conventional health risks or pregnancy resulting from a criminal act were all valid grounds for termination (Fuszara, 1991:117). The lack of sexual education, information, and availability of contraceptives however, mean that for many Polish women the procedure served as a form of birth control, maintaining the high percentage of terminated pregnancies (Nowakowska, 2001).

⁵⁴ This was not without any previous acquiescence; the Church representatives were invited to the 'Round Table' discussion between the communist party and the representatives of the trade unions during the early stages of the negotiations in 1989. Later, the Church helped to facilitate the first free elections, and even promoted certain candidates (for more details see Engelberg, 1991).

⁵⁵ According to this approach the following decisions were taken: in April 1990 the regulation was passed requiring a woman seeking an abortion to obtain the approval of two gynaecologists, her family doctor [GP], and a psychologist. In May 1990 women were requested to consult three doctors before being able to get an abortion in public hospital; the end of subsidies for birth control pills was introduced followed by a sharp increase in their prices. In May 1992 a Code of Ethics, adopted by the Order of Physicians few months earlier, went into effect forbidding physicians from performing abortions, except in cases of rape or danger to the mother, with any violation of this provision resultant in terminating a doctor's license. In February 1993 an abortion law was passed by the parliament and signed by Lech Wałęsa, the then president of the country. The timeline based on Gagnere (1993).

⁵⁶ According to the bill, which is still official today, abortion in Poland is possible 'only in public hospitals when a mother's health or life is threatened, when prenatal examinations (amniocentesis) prove serious, incurable deformity of the foetus, or when pregnancy is the result of rape or incest and had been reported to the police' (Nowicka, 1994:154).

⁵⁷ See for example Arcimowicz (2007a); Łaciak (2007); Fuszara (2007); Adamski (2002); Slany (2002); Marody (2000a).

⁵⁸ On the discussion about the links between the trends for domestication of women and the emergence of feminism see for example Dunin (2006); Watson (1992; 1993a; 1993b); Landes (1988).

⁵⁹ For feminist discussions on the women's stories, lives, oppression, and rebellions 'hidden from history' see for example Saadawi (2007); Lerner (2005); Baudino *et al.* (2005); Radcliffe and Westwood (1995); Rowbotham (1977); Carroll (1976).

⁶⁰ For a detailed discussion on the marginalisation of women's political engagement see for example Mitchell and Schell (2007); Earle (2000); Rueschemeyer (1998); Radcliffe and Westwood (1995).

⁶¹ For a further detailed discussion see for example Elshtain (1981); Lloyd (1984); Bordo (1987).

⁶² See for example Jarosz (2005); Palska (2002); Domański *et al.* (2000); Hardy (2009); Stenning (2005a); Smith *et al.* (2008).

⁶³ According to the definition on the Polish National Statistical Office GUS (Główny Urząd Statystyczny) the working age comprises those between the age of 15 and 59 (for women) and 64 (for men). The working age according to the Eurostat definition accounts for those between 15-64 years old.

⁶⁴ One of the main differentiators between the socialist poverty and the new poverty is the growing number of children affected by impoverishment. In the 1970s poverty affected mainly the retired people and pensioners, whereas researchers estimate that in the late 1990s impoverishment affected from 800.000 to 3 million children (Tarkowska, 2001:91). In 2007 the UNICEF report showed that Polish children are the poorest amongst the 24 developed countries, and the Eurostat report on *The Living Conditions in 2008* revealed that 22 percent of those aged 0-17 are at risk of poverty. It is the large families that are most susceptible to the risk of poverty.

⁶⁵ For details see Jarosz (2005).

⁶⁶ Sources: *Wzrost, Zatrudnienie i Standardy Życia Polaków w Dobie Akcesji*. (2004). Warszawa: Bank Światowy; *Warunki Życia Ludności Polski w Latach 2004-2005*. (2007). Główny Urząd Statystyczny; *Stopa Bezrobocia w Latach 1990-2010*. Główny Urząd Statystyczny.

⁶⁷ There are various poverty measures (lines) in Poland. I define here the one used by Główny Urząd Statystyczny (the Central Statistical Office) and Instytut Pracy i Spraw Socjalnych (the Institute of Labour and Social Studies), and which I use in my discussion. The 'social minimum' identifies the sphere of deprivation taking into account the basket of goods and services recognised as indispensable for the normal functioning of an individual in society: food, accommodation, clothing, healthcare, public transport, but also education, leisure, sport. The 'subsistence minimum' classifies only needs that require to be addressed immediately: food, accommodation, medication, personal hygiene, elementary education of children, and is less than half the figure of the social minimum (Kurowski, 2002:3). The 'relative poverty line' is set at 50 percent of the average household expenditure estimated for the total number of households in the country. The 'official poverty line' is set below the level which enables people to receive social benefits.

⁶⁸ For detailed discussion see for example Nowak (2009); Murawska (2006); Tarkowska (2001; 2002b; 2009b); Warzywoda-Kruszyńska and Grotowska-Leder, (1996).

⁶⁹ Sources: *Kobiety i Mężczyźni na Rynku Pracy Report*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2006; *Aktywność Ekonomiczna Ludności Polski III Kwartał 2008*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny; *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 2009*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny; *Aktywność Ekonomiczna Ludności Polski II Kwartał 2010*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny.

⁷⁰ For details see for example Warzywoda-Kruszyńska and Grotowska-Leder (1996); Reszke (2001), Tarkowska (2002b).

⁷¹ Other reasons for the declining trends in the fertility rates include for example: the high unemployment rates, low household income and the growing trends of women's labour migration linked with EU membership. For more details see for example Coyle (2007).

⁷² All data based on research conducted by Instytut Gospodarstwa Społecznego and Główny Urząd Statystyczny in 1968 and 1988. The researched cohort had similar socio-professional characteristics: all women were married, had children, were running the households and worked professionally. For more details see: Kurzynowski (2000).

⁷³ Alimony Fund (Fundusz Alimentacyjny) established in 1975 to support children whose fathers, for various reasons, have not been able to pay the alimony, subject to availability restrictions based on the minimal level of income per person in the household. In November 2003 (Dz. U. z 2003 r. Nr 228, poz. 2255) the Fund was dissolved only to be reinstated in October 2008 (Dz. U. z 2007 r. Nr 192,

poz. 1378). More details on the discussion regarding the reestablishment of the fund available under: <http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Biuletyn.nsf/wgskmr6/PSR-31>

⁷⁴ Tarkowska (2009) argues that alcoholism is often the result of long term poverty, rather than the cause, and the lack of compassion for those affected by impoverishment comes from the lack of knowledge and remoteness of the more affluent social groups.

⁷⁵ Dziennik Ustaw nr 52, poz. 538.

⁷⁶ Art. 14 Ustawy z 6.12.2008 and Art.182 Kodeksu Pracy.

⁷⁷ Research findings discussed by Sylwia Chutnik, a Chairwoman of 'MaMa' Foundation, in a radio programme broadcasted on 22nd April 2008 at the TOKFM radio station.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Abbott and Wallace (1990); Oakley (1993); Ribbens and Edwards (1998); Lawler (2000); Miller (2005).

⁷⁹ Such an outcome corresponds with the epistemological underpinning of this study, more than the positivistic approach, even though some may argue that quantitative work is regarded to be more 'systematic, precise, rigorous, and formal' than the qualitative one (Kiser, 1997:151).

⁸⁰ Consequent to my graduation from University of Szczecin in Poland in 2001 I have moved to England.

⁸¹ See for example Marody (2000b); Palska (2002); Jarosz (2005); Gilejko (2005); Kozarzewski (2005); Kozak (2005); Jurczyńska-McCluskey *et al.* (2006); Weiner (2007).

⁸² After reaching its lowest level in years, 8.8 percent in October 2008, the national unemployment rate has been again on a steadily rise reaching 13 percent in February 2010. June 1991 was the previous last time when the unemployment rate was below 9 percent. For more details see: http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_677_PLK_HTML.htm
http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/5840_1446_PLK_HTML.htm

⁸³ The National Census is the most detailed report prepared by Główny Urząd Statystyczny periodically containing information about numbers and geographical locations of the Polish population, socio-demographic and employment structures, but also socio-economic features of households and families, their resources and living conditions on the national, regional and local levels. The last one was conducted in 2002 and I used some of the data in my analysis from this Census. The next one is scheduled for 2011. For more information regarding the background of the National Census see: http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/6529_PLK_HTML.htm

⁸⁴ The Regional Job Centre www.powiatkolobrzeg.home.pl

⁸⁵ On many occasions I asked the questions in different ways and different order because I wanted to be flexible and reflexive during the interview situation. But, Clandinin and Connelly note, that regardless of who asks questions, in fact it is 'the kinds of questions asked and the ways they are structured, [that] provide a frame within which participants shape their accounts of their experience' (2000:110).

⁸⁶ I was welcomed as a guest; tea or coffee was offered and a home-made cake or a sandwich was waiting for me, and I was made to feel welcome.

⁸⁷ See for example Spender (1985); Thorne *et al.* (1983); Miller and Swift (1977); Thorne and Henley (1975); Lakoff (1975).

⁸⁸ For example, many of the women's activities linked with the private sphere are prominent in women's lives, yet none of them would comfortably sit within the categorisations of 'work' and 'leisure' that can usually be more clearly defined in relation to men's lives (Smith, 1987:68).

⁸⁹ For more details see for example Andrews *et al.* (2000); Holstein and Gubrium (2000); Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

⁹⁰ For more details see the city's official website www.miaasto.kolobrzeg.eu

⁹¹ In June 2010 the unemployment rate was 9.1 percent for the city of Kołobrzeg, 15.4 percent for the Zachodniopomorskie Voivodeship, and 11.6 percent the national average. Source: The Regional Job Centre www.powiatkolobrzeg.home.pl

⁹² For a thorough discussion see for example Carling *et al.* (2002); Crompton (2006); González and Salsona (2000); Martin (2000); Blossfield (1995).

⁹³ See for example Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk (2000); Kenney (1999); Titkow (1998); Bystydziński (1989); Corrin (1992; 1999).

⁹⁴ For a detailed discussion see e.g. Lopata (1971); Oakley (1974); Johnson and Lloyd (2004); Gatrell, (2008).

⁹⁵ See also for example Oleksy (2000); Corrin (1992:11); Ferree (1995); Einhorn (1993).

⁹⁶ Detailed discussion regarding shifts in the patterns of family life can be found for example in Carling *et al.* (2002); Crompton (2006); González and Salsona (2000); Martin (2000); Blossfield (1995); Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995).

⁹⁷ See for example Jarosz (2005); Palska (2002); Domański *et al.* (2000); Hardy (2009); Stenning (2005a); Smith *et al.* (2008).

⁹⁸ Kasia's husband assumed he could be present during the interview. After an awkward wait I had to tell him that I had come to interview Kasia privately. His subsequent comment left a palpable feeling that he was not content: 'but you will only be talking about the children, right? - or will you talk about secret matters?' It seemed as if he was dubious about my intentions and wished to supervise our discussion. Having described the interview subject to him he then wanted to be able to voice his own opinions about the children, a matter he obviously felt he was equally concerned with. He did leave eventually albeit reluctantly and then only after I emphasised that my work was exclusively concerned with the female perspective of motherhood. A future interview with another researcher might find his opinions significant however.

⁹⁹ See for example Federacja Kobiet Przeciwno Klauzuli Sumienia dla Farmaceutów. *Gazeta Prawna* 11th March 2011.

¹⁰⁰ Such 'conscience clause' already exists in the medical profession and Catholic pharmacists lobby to extend it to their profession.

¹⁰¹ This political exclusion by the state, according to some research, had greater negative impact on men and their self-respect than on women, which was manifested in the rising mortality of adult men in every East European country from the mid-1960s onwards (Watson, 2000:375; 1995).

¹⁰² Cited in Watson (2000:375).

¹⁰³ For more details see for example Tarkowska (2002a; 2002b; 2009a; 2009b); Nowak (2009); Palska (2002); Warzywoda-Kruszyńska and Grotowska-Leder (1996).